FONTANA

Nicholas Mosley

Rules of the Game

Sir Oswald and Lady Cynthia Mosley, 1896-1933

The dazzling, evocative story of a man who might have led the nation but who broke the rules – in politics and in love

Rules of the Game

Nicholas Mosley was born in 1923 and educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. He served in Italy as an infantry officer during the Second World War, since when he has been a professional writer.

He has published eleven novels of which the first was *Spaces of the Dark* (1951); the others include *Accident* (1964; filmed by Joseph Losey), *Impossible Object* (1968), *Natalie Natalia* (1971) and, most recently, three related books: *Catastrophe Practice*, *Imago Bird* and *Serpent*. His other works include *Experience and Religion* (1964), *The Assassination of Trotsky* (1972) and *Julian Grenfell: his life and the times of his death, 1888-1915* (1976). His latest book, the sequel to *Rules of the Game*, is *Beyond the Pale: Sir Oswald Mosley, 1933-80* (1983).

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NICHOLAS MOSLEY

Rules of the Game

Sir Oswald and
Lady Cynthia Mosley
1896–1933

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Foreword

On May 11th 1979 a remark was reported in the *New Statesman* that my father, Oswald Mosley, 'must be the only Englishman today who is beyond the pale'. This statement was made about a man of eighty-two who had not been active in politics for fifteen years: who when he had been active – a period of world-wide violence and crime – had been convicted of no offence (he had been acquitted of one charge of assault and one of riotous assembly) and whose policies had for the most part been ignored and had come to nothing. The remark seemed ridiculous but in one sense apt – as being representative of what undoubtedly were many people's feelings about him. The phrase 'beyond the pale' gives an impression of something taboo: of a person not just whose attitudes had once been strongly disagreed with (he had been leader of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s) but in contact with whom even now there might be danger. The commentator in the *New Statesman* continued – 'Nobody would flinch if you'd come back from Moscow and said you'd lunched with Kim Philby'. This implied that the news that someone had lunched with Oswald Mosley, in contrast to the news that one had met a notorious traitor, might cause almost physical alarm.

My purpose in writing this book is not to provide a biography of my father nor to give a comprehensive account of his politics: these tasks have been done admirably by his biographer Robert Skidelsky. I have tried to write a personal story of him and of my efforts to understand him: his child had to make these efforts to make sense of himself. The story might be of interest to others because in so far as it is true that there was something akin to a taboo about my father, then an understanding of this might give an insight into the nature of human beings and society.

My father was adored and hated, respected and feared, pitied and reviled. But both those who abominated him from a distance and those

who were charmed by his presence (most people were) had the impression of something awesome about him that could not quite be put into words. It was as if he were a Greek tragic hero to whom disaster had occurred (or which he had caused to occur) which had set him apart: the power of the taboo in this tradition resides in the paradoxical impression that the disaster both is, and is not, the person's fault. The history of the twentieth century has revolved around men who through overweening pride and force of circumstance have felt themselves set apart: who have both ridden on, and felt themselves driven by, the slavish adorations and hatreds that others have felt towards them.

It is difficult for an academic biographer or a political historian to write about such paradoxes: it is their tradition to deal with what is seen as a world of facts. It has been the job of dramatists and novelists, traditionally, to try to relate facts to what might be seen as patterns and recurring predicaments of mind: to try to write of human experience as if what human beings were was not separate from it.

I myself am by vocation a novelist. My father did not read novels: he thought it was the task of an individual to try to order reasonably the world of facts. But his relationship with me, his eldest son, was often paradoxical. From my side at least there was loyalty and some hostility, anger and bewilderment, nearly always love. Towards the end of his life he cut me out of his will on the grounds that I was 'not his sort of person': yet the very last time I saw him, ten days before his death, he announced that he wanted me to inherit all his papers. I had told him that I hoped to write this book. It was as if when death approached he did not retract anything he felt about power (money, to him, was a form of power) but he knew as part of him had always known that if anything was to survive of what he had cared about it would be to do with efforts at truth.

CHAPTER 1

Tom

My father Oswald Mosley was born on November 16th 1896; he was in line to be the heir to a Staffordshire baronetcy and estate. His mother, Maud Mosley, had three sons in quick succession and then she left her husband – on account (this was the family legend) of his insatiable and promiscuous sexual habits. Maud Mosley was a woman of piety and rectitude; she moved to Shropshire to be near her own family. There, without the sort of money she might have expected, she brought up her three sons of whom her favourite was the eldest Oswald. She called him her 'man-child': he became the man-about-the-house. He wrote years later of how he had always been 'passionately devoted' to his mother: how even as a child he had repaid her devotion to him by 'gratuitous advice and virile assertion on every subject under the sun'. Apart from members of her family there were no further male influences in her life, he said, 'other than an occasional preacher of exceptional gifts'.

The chief male influence in Oswald's early life was his paternal grandfather, also called Oswald: he too had quarrelled with his son and did not see much of him. There was thus an alliance between the grandfather and the grandson Oswald, and the latter's childhood alternated between his mother's comparatively small house in Shropshire and the stateliness of his grandfather's house Rolleston Hall in Staffordshire. Grandfather Oswald was an imposing, paternalistic figure nicknamed John Bull: he too, like his son, lived apart from his wife. Rolleston Hall was a Victorian mansion with a full complement of grooms, gardeners, coachmen, indoor servants and so on. Life in both Shropshire and Staffordshire revolved mainly around horses and dogs, as it was apt to do in upper-class county families. There was hunting, steeplechasing, shooting and fishing. It was held to be much easier in

those days, my father wrote later, to show emotions towards animals than to human beings.

The exception to this in some ways seemed to be his father, the ne'er-do-well, also called Oswald. This Oswald was a rake, a gambler; one of his bets had been to do with a game of golf down Pall Mall; another with shooting out all the street lights in Piccadilly with a pistol from a hansom cab. He had for a time set himself up in an inn in a village next to Rolleston in opposition to his father: there he had entertained women: it was said he was trying to emulate one of his ancestors who had been known as The Tutbury Tup (Tutbury was the name of the village; 'tup' the local name for a ram). Another story was that the last straw that drove his wife Maud to leave him was not just the sum of his infidelities, but her finding a bundle of letters to his mistresses which showed that he was saying just the same things to them, and even giving them the same presents, as he was to her.

What grandfather Oswald objected to was not so much the fact of his son's relationships with women but that these should be flaunted publicly. Grandfather Oswald was not averse to 'recompense' (his grandson wrote) so long as it was conducted 'with the utmost discretion and dignity'. However there was a tradition amongst the three Oswalds – grandfather, father and son – that their quarrels should be aired publicly. Each father challenged his son to a boxing match in front of assembled servants: grandfather Oswald once fought his son with one of his (the grandfather's) hands tied behind his back: the son was knocked out. Years later this Oswald, the rake, challenged his son, my father, to a match: he was again apparently on the point of being knocked out when the bout ended. This Oswald (his son wrote) had on the mantelpiece of his bachelor apartment a contemporary drawing of an ample lady in a very tight skirt with a monocled dandy walking behind her: it bore the caption 'Life is just one damned thing after another'.

My father used to claim that he had made a study of psychoanalysis in later life and had decided that the violent complexities of his childhood had had no effect on him whatever. He would explain – the healthy psyche can throw off an injury which in the weak becomes a complex. But also – 'It is possible to go even further, and to say that additional strength can come from an early injury'. This assertion seems somewhat to contradict the former: also, additional strength can take the form of numbness or armour plating.

There was a story my father told in his autobiography of how his mother had been hurled out of a pony-cart which was being driven

recklessly by his father just before the birth of one of his brothers: from her diaries, however, it appears that the child about to be born was himself.

His mother kept a daily diary from the time of her marriage for over fifty years. When she died she left these to her youngest son; whom my father persuaded to hand them over, and then he burned them – all except those to do with the first four years of his life, and one of a slightly later date which survived half scorched. My father also tore out, and preserved, the entry for the day of his mother's birthday (January 2nd) from each of the diaries that he burned. But what was it that he wanted to eliminate by this *auto-da-fé*?

In his autobiography my father wrote movingly of his childhood: of the orderliness, the hierarchical but somehow classless patterns of life in his mother's house and in the semi-feudal grandeur of the estate at Rolleston. His grandfather ran a champion herd of shorthorn cattle: he was a passionate advocate and producer of unadulterated wholemeal bread. In the pursuance of good stockbreeding and correct land-management everyone on the estate seemed to work willingly and to accept his allotted place: there were few incitements and few opportunities to change. All his life my father retained a love of the English countryside and of its seasonal pursuits. But there were also things in him that seemed to rage against this tradition, and to demand change.

What he did not remember perhaps or indeed tried to cauterise memories of in the burning of his mother's diaries was that running parallel to the orderliness of country life was also a tendency ferocious and dismal which haunted people with too many servants and not enough to do: there were the quarrels, the separations, the lawsuits, the punch-ups; much of the emotions seemed to be taken out on horses as things to spur on or be spurred by. But even in the pages that remain of his mother's diaries before he was four she tells of an instance of my father being bullied by his father: 'Had a miserable time W teasing Tom and I trying to defend him; and finally W caught hold of my wrist hurting it badly'. (W is for 'Waldie' – the name by which the middle Oswald was known: and Tom is the name by which my father, the youngest Oswald, was known and will be known here).

And then in the diary that survived the flames, Tom's mother wrote of a fortnight's visit that he and his younger brother Ted had to pay to their father: the year was 1909; Tom was twelve and Ted nine.

> During their stay their father repeatedly urged them to kiss the Parlourmaid (before her) and the Cook. He went into the children's

bedroom with nothing on but a nightshirt and talked to the P.maid who was there calling them. Told Tommy how he had a box at the Gaiety each night for a month and took the actresses out to supper and he would do the same . . . they would go to the Metropolitan and sit in the front and yell the choruses. Had rats down from London in a box (3 doz) and let the dogs worry them. No bath, hat on in house, altogether low.

Compared to this, life in Tom's mother's house must indeed have seemed lofty: nothing much seemed to happen to her other than tea-parties, shopping, going to church, and bad weather. Tom in the holidays hunted and went ferreting. But perhaps the very lack of impositions of such a life – and freedom for the most part from his father – gave him confidence. From his young boys' school in Shropshire he wrote to his mother in the only surviving letter of his childhood – 'We had a preliminary debate last night, and I made a speech which came off tremendously'.

He was sent to a preparatory boarding school at the age of nine, and to his public school, Winchester, at the age of twelve. He hated both schools unashamedly and with an intensity that went on into old age. He made few friends: he wrote in his autobiography – 'the dreary waste of public school existence was only relieved by learning and homosexuality; at that time I had no capacity for the former and I never had any taste for the latter'. His escape was into the gymnasium where he became a boxer and a prize-winning fencer. He won the public schools championships in both foil and sabre at the age of fifteen: both the double victory and the early age were records. His mentors at Winchester were his boxing and fencing instructors Sergeant Major Adam and Sergeant Ryan: he wrote about these in later years with something like love.

At home he had been able to go his own way: at school, he was forced to be a subordinate member of a group. His dislike of this situation, and his determination to be trapped within it for as short a time as possible, seemed to stay with him for the rest of his life. He persuaded his family to let him leave Winchester when he was just seventeen: he went to Sandhurst to train to be a regular soldier.

At Sandhurst he had to submit to strict and almost brutal discipline while on duty and on the parade ground; but there was toleration of quite anarchic behaviour out of hours. What the cadets liked to do in the evenings was to pile into cars (this was 1913) and go up to London and there provoke fights with the chuckers-out at places like the Empire

Music Hall (might Tom have bumped into his father?): the point of these expeditions were the fights, more than the pursuit of women. Then when the cadets arrived back at the barracks somewhat battered and drunk they would be helped to bed as if by nannies by the same sergeants who, the next day, would revile them for any indecorum on the parade ground. My father used to call this 'the corinthian tradition': and it seemed to represent, as if in some echo from childhood, a condition by which group-life might be possible for him. He described how on his arrival at Sandhurst he had picked out to be his cronies 'some fifty to a hundred boys who seemed to me particularly objectionable'. Team spirit was made palatable so long as there was at the back of it the chance of swashbuckling, or revolt.

The gangs of toughs, however, were apt to fight amongst themselves. In one dispute about a polo pony there were insults, threats of horse-whippings, violence; and in the subsequent fracas my father, while attempting to evade pursuers, fell from the ledge of an upstairs window and injured his leg. The details of this story are confused: such goings-on were common at Sandhurst: what is indubitable is that my father accepted even if he did not originally provoke a fight, which for a time he seemed to be winning, and then he ended up a victim.

By the time the war came in August 1914 he had recovered from his injury and he was commissioned into a smart cavalry regiment, the 16th Lancers. He spent some time in Ireland and then, because there did not seem to be much chance of the cavalry being used in the war, he volunteered to join the newly formed Royal Flying Corps who were in need of observers. These did not need much training. Like many young men at the time he was afraid that the war might be over by Christmas and that he would have missed it. By Christmas he was in fact in France flying in one of the flimsy aeroplanes that were used mainly for purposes of observation. He and his pilot were shot at from the ground and they could not retaliate; though pilots and observers occasionally shot at enemy planes with rifles and pistols. There were not more than about sixty men in the RFC actually flying at the time; this was war in an élitist tradition even more than it might have been with the cavalry. In Tom's words he and his fellow airmen were 'like men having dinner together in a country-house-party knowing that some must soon leave for ever; in the end, nearly all'. They were heroes: but, suspended in the air in their flimsy machines, very much in the tradition of being in some sense sacrificial. There was a song popular among the men of the RFC at the time which was called *The Dying Aviator*, in which there was described, with the lugubrious humour that the English traditionally make use of

in times of stress, how a crashed airman's mutilated body had become inextricably intermingled with parts of his machine.

One incident in the war which stayed in Tom's mind came during the second battle of Ypres in April 1915 when he had been detailed to take a message by car from the RFC to some Canadians in the front line; he had stayed drinking with the Canadians longer than had been intended; he had to make his way back on foot. Then he saw, from the vantage point of a hill, massed German infantry regiments moving with parade-ground precision to the attack – to what might be either success or annihilation by machine-gun fire. He seems to have been half enthralled, half repelled, by this spectacle. He wondered about such dedication: was it necessary for it to be involved with such prospects of death?

In the spring of 1915 he went to train for his pilot's certificate at Shoreham in Sussex. He wrote in his autobiography 'My flying was not bad though I was weak on the mechanical side ... my argument was that once in the air you could do nothing about it if anything went wrong, and on the ground the machine was looked after by our friends the mechanics and riggers'. This attitude was a forerunner of his attitudes in later life – his belief that mundane day-to-day jobs could safely be left to what he called 'professionals'.

He got his pilot's certificate. But soon after, when he was being watched from the ground by his admiring mother who had come specially to see him, he decided to show off, did not notice that the wind had changed, came in too fast to land; then – 'the machine hit the ground with a bang and was thrown high into the air'. Still flying, he realised that the plane's undercarriage was damaged: he had to circle and make a pancake landing which involved stalling just above the ground. He managed to do this, but from too great a height: the floor of the cockpit was driven up against his legs. The leg which he had injured a year ago was crushed again but this time more severely. Once more, what had begun as an act of bravado had ended with his being a victim.

His leg was patched up. Then he was called back to his cavalry regiment who were now fighting as infantry and needed their officers. During the winter of 1915–16 he was on and off in the trenches or marching to and fro; much of the time he was in deep mud and water. The bones of his leg had not properly healed: they became infected: he was sent home, and there was talk of his leg having to be amputated. He persuaded the surgeon to try to save it; and this the surgeon did, replacing the infected parts with other bits of bone from the leg. Tom

finished his active service in the war with his right leg an inch and a half shorter than the other.

There is something unfulfilled about Tom in the war: this is one of the areas his mother's diaries might have shed light on. He had flown bravely in the RFC: but it is evident that when in the trenches he was involved in no attack, and it seems unlikely that he had to undergo a large-scale enemy attack or he would have mentioned this. In his autobiography he tells as one of the highlights of his time in the front line a story of how when an attack was expected his colonel came round and told the junior officers that they would be recommended for the Military Cross if they held their ground: then the attack did not materialise. The way Tom told such a story (it would seem to have been improper for a commanding officer to have held out the bait of an MC to anyone for doing something so ordinary as resisting an attack) suggests that he wanted to establish as much as possible that he had been close to direct fighting. He certainly suffered under bombardments: he endured the nerve-breaking business of tunnelling for the placing of mines. But having set out with courage to be something of a hero, he found that he was to survive the war through a series of misfortunes.

The war's last two years he spent working in London in the Ministry of Munitions and in the Foreign Office. He read a lot, and entered into what used to be called London society. This was for him a time of transformation. He himself described how before this he had been intellectually dim: he had loved boxing, fencing, and horses. He had also been much on his own and usually at odds with the people around him. Now, having done his duty, and as a wounded soldier returned from war, he made up for lost opportunities. He read 'voraciously' – about history and politics; often, the speeches of famous politicians in history. He wanted to train himself for what he wanted to become. He thought of going to a university; but it seemed to him that other requirements were more pressing.

The war had affected him deeply: he was appalled by human stupidity – by what seemed to be the wilful waste of human life and resources. He had also observed, and tried to emulate himself, a sort of dashingness which seemed to surmount the waste: which might be a way to prevent it, if only it could be harnessed to reason instead of to destruction. He determined himself to try to do this.

It was during these years at the end of the war that he first got his reputation as a seducer of women. Up till now he had wanted to be a hero among men: but in London during 1917 and 1918 it would have been difficult to avoid the challenges, and opportunities, provided by

women. Women like wounded soldiers – who can be mothered, as well as admired. And Tom must have felt himself ready to try a new form of conquest. He was taken up, at first, by somewhat older married women: it was the convention of course in the society in which he moved that young men should have affairs only with married women: unmarried girls were to be worshipped from afar. Tom became a lover of Margaret Montagu, who was a hostess in Leicestershire; of Catherine D'Erlanger, of Maxine Elliott, who entertained on the outskirts of London. Through the latter he met for the first time eminent politicians – Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, F. E. Smith. His successes with women gave him confidence with older men: confidence with politicians of course added to his successes with women. It cannot be known what sparked the whole process off: there was something sudden about his reputation for brilliance and wit. When, years later, people used to ask him how it was that someone like himself had emerged from such a family background he would say – as if it were a quotation and poking fun at himself – 'when fire meets oil, then springs the spark divine' – fire being his father and oil his mother – and then he would laugh; especially if this was said in the presence of his mother.

The older men whom Tom liked at this time he admired for their toughness, their cleverness: it is unlikely he much admired them for their politics. They, having won the war, seemed to be not so much resting on their laurels as selling off bits of them to bidders. There was little will amongst older politicians to re-order the world with burning enthusiasm and in the light of reason. The old political games went on in the old way played by the 'hard-faced men who had done well out of the war'. The difference between Tom and other idealists of his generation was that he, in addition to his idealism, felt that he had the skill to take on the older generation at their own machinations.

The reputation for brilliance he had won in social and political salons meant that he was soon approached by Conservative and Liberal whips to see if he would stand for Parliament: both parties wanted young candidates who might seem some leaven to the hard-faced lump. Tom was asked if he would stand as a Conservative for the Stone division of Staffordshire; also for the Harrow division of Middlesex. He chose the latter, ostensibly on the grounds that he did not want to seem to be taking advantage of family connections, but also because thus it would be easier to maintain his social connections in London. He made it plain he did not care about political party labels; he was going into Parliament to represent the war generation – or himself.

The war ended on November 11th 1918; a general election was set for December 14th. Tom's election manifesto set the tone for much of the rest of his political life. What he undertook to fight for were – high wages, nationalisation of transport and of electricity, ex-soldiers to be offered smallholdings, grants for housing and educational scholarships to be provided by the state, fiscal protection for home industries and trade with the colonies, prevention of immigration by undesirable aliens, and the promotion by all possible means of the strength and prestige of the British Empire. These were fine words: he was no different from other politicans in not elucidating how they were to be implemented.

Tom was officially the candidate of the coalition government: his opponent, Mr Chamberlayne, a sixty-five-year-old solicitor, was standing as an Independent. Tom joked – 'An Independent is someone on whom no one can depend.' Mr Chamberlayne attacked his opponent for his youth, his wealth, and what he said was his inflated war record. Tom won the argument about this (the dispute had been about the date of his commission): and retaliated by saying he would not follow 'into the political gutter' such 'aborigines of the political world'. He was not yet good at making set speeches; but he had from the beginning, a talent for fighting back; for vituperation. He was duly elected the member for Harrow with a majority of 10,000. He became the youngest MP. He was just twenty two.

His successes had been sudden and startling but his talents were still those of the individual fighter; on unaccustomed ground he could be awkward and shy: he still had little aptitude for the business of working in a group. One cause he did take up was the promotion of the embryonic League of Nations. But a contemporary remembered him in his early days in the House of Commons as being 'a lonely, detached figure wandering unhappily about the lobbies of the House, uncertain of his mind. The war, he would say, had planted the seeds of doubt; parties were changing, new political creeds running molten from the crucible of old faiths; and he did not know which way to make his own.'

He had got into Parliament by his individual skills: it perhaps seemed to him that he would not make his way far in Parliament unless he could find some sort of status, some vantage-point, which would balance his solitariness and haughtiness and enable him to work with other people or from which to impose on them his personality. He needed to turn people's view of him from that of a somewhat louring if elegant lone-wolf into someone more approachable. He needed, in fact, something personal. He was very good looking. He was practised at love.

At the end of 1919 he went down to Plymouth to help Nancy Astor in the by-election in which she was campaigning to become the first woman MP. There he met a fellow helper, a girl whom he had come across once or twice during the last year. She was Cynthia, second daughter of Earl Curzon of Kedleston, the Foreign Secretary in Lloyd George's coalition government. He fell in love with Cynthia: he had not fallen in love before. He asked her to marry him. At first she refused. She had, it seemed, heard something of his reputation. He pursued her with letters. He tried to make legible his strange, angular handwriting.

My mother Cynthia was always known as Cim or Cimmie, just as my father was known as Tom.

Betton House
Market Drayton
Shropshire

Cim darling.

Do not forget dinner Tuesday 7 pm. Really that is only an excuse to write to you – and I do so hate writing letters! I could write such wonderful letters if I could only dictate them like a speech or a newspaper article; but with a hand like this how can any sentiment or expression be other than ridiculous. An authority on these matters told me once that my writing could only mean genius or lunacy: in my youthful arrogance I welcomed the former conclusion, but since the present obsession I am driven to believe that the latter alternative is true. Not very complimentary to you! but a consuming disease of this intensity can be nothing short of lunacy. I remember Disraeli said somewhere that it was better to doubt of the creed in which you have been nurtured than of the personal powers on which you have staked your life. I now so agree with him. I have always believed, and so far found it to be true, that the will of men could conquer all emotion or pain whether spiritual or physical and mould the world to be just a reflection of its own personality. And now I have discovered an emotion, or is it a disease of the mind, which is more powerful than even the human spirit. What nonsense I write!

I have come down here after a strenuous League of Nations trip; staying alone with my mother until Monday, return London *mutatis mutandis*. A good meeting on Friday at Leamington. I became embroiled with some Roman Catholic priests – Canon Barry and others – who are opposing the League. Sir Ernest Pollock's ministerial dismay at the prospects of a brawl between the clericals and myself

in his constituency was very comic! However after a slightly acrimonious debate we got a nearly unanimous resolution in the League's favour. They have now asked me to take over the League of Nations campaign throughout the country as the chairman of Campaign Committee at Headquarters. It entails several hours of work a day at their London office in addition to everything else, but I think I must do it as it is in the greatest of all causes, and really the more I am smothered in work the better.

I have thought so much of things down here in the lull after the storm. As you too have heard of these dead things from my short but weary past – as it now appears to me – I wonder whether you set out in some strange idea of avenging anything your sex has suffered from me? If so I must congratulate you, for few mortals have attained so complete a measure of success in even their most facile aspirations! I do not believe it to be true; for – worst of all – I think you were not even sufficiently interested for that! I would surrender the present with the ages to come and those past, just once to make you cry as I have made others cry; and then instead of leaving as I have always left tears, to kiss those tears away. Whatever you feel for me whether nothing or everything will never affect my love for you. I do want to marry you and always shall: but until you also feel as I do, if indeed you ever do, I am so happy just to be with you in a way I never thought possible between men and women. I shall have been a whole week on Tuesday without seeing you and I do want to be with you so often and will not make love to you (yet awhile!)

Tom

CHAPTER 2

Cimmie

Cynthia or Cimmie Curzon was from a background odder than Tom's, and was thought by her friends to be herself unconventional.

Her father George Curzon was the eldest son of an aristocratic Derbyshire family, the Scarsdales, who had been from time to time on visiting terms with the Mosleys. George Curzon had emerged from an upbringing by neglectful parents and a sadistic nanny, had flourished at Eton and Balliol, had travelled across Persia on horseback, had been a founder member of the social élite called The Souls, had entered Parliament at the age of twenty seven, and had seemed set for a remarkable political career. His only hindrance was that as heir to a not very rich estate and with his father Viscount Scarsdale still alive, he did not have much money.

Cimmie's mother was Mary Leiter, the daughter of Levi Zebidee Leiter, a Chicago millionaire. It would seem from the names that the Leiters were Jewish; but apparently in origins they were Mennonites, a protestant sect originating in Holland. The Leiters had emigrated to America in the eighteenth century. Levi Leiter made his fortune in Chicago real estate in the 1860s: then, at the insistence of his wife, he moved to Washington, in order that the family might exercise its fortune at one of the centres of American social life. That the Leiters successfully managed to do this was largely due to the charms of the eldest daughter Mary. Before her eighteenth birthday she was being hailed as the belle of innumerable balls, and was on socially intimate terms with members of the political and literary intelligentsia. Having 'conquered' Washington and New York (girls in the 1880s were talked about in those terms) she moved on, with her mother, to Paris and London. There, in 1890, she met George Curzon.

George proposed marriage in 1893: Mary accepted: they professed

undying love. George said he wanted to keep the engagement secret in order to consolidate his political career by travelling in India and Afghanistan: they were with each other for only two days in the next two years. When they were finally married in 1895 Levi Leiter settled £140,000 on his daughter and an additional income of £6,000 a year. George had hoped for £9,000 but had 'no doubt that we can perfectly well get on with less'. There is a legend in the Leiter family that on the eve of the wedding George asked for more money from Levi Leiter. Whatever the truth of this, there seems to have been little liking between the two families.

The couple settled in England in London and then at Reigate Priory in Surrey. George was appointed Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. Mary was unhappy; after the social successes of her youth she now found herself often alone. George's old friends seemed to ignore her: perhaps she did not want to play the game by which English upper-class married women made themselves sexually available. George was much of the time in London.

George's family was not much help. When visiting Kedleston, the Scarsdale home in Derbyshire, Mary noted that George's father was:

> very fond of examining his tongue in a mirror. When he sits reading or writing he makes the most fiendish grimaces. He sleeps with his feet 2ft higher than his head with no blanket over him in the midst of winter, he has 18 thermometers in his sitting room and the tables are covered with magazines and railway almanacs of 1839.

A first child, Irene, was born in 1896. By the time my mother Cimmie was born on August 23rd 1898 things were looking better. George had just been appointed Viceroy of India at the extraordinarily young age of thirty nine. Mary (she wrote to her mother) was about to fill 'the greatest place ever held by an American abroad'. There were interviews with Queen Victoria: enormous expenditures on clothes and jewels. It was accepted that Viceroys had to find huge sums out of their own fortunes. Mary asked her father for more money. But all this happened just at the time when Mary's brother Joe Leiter, in Chicago, had attempted to 'corner the wheat market', which meant borrowing huge sums of money to buy up, literally, all the wheat in America with a view to pushing the price up before selling. In the end he had been outwitted by a rival who imported wheat from Canada across the frozen Great Lakes by means of ice-breakers: so now Joe was in debt to the extent of nine million dollars. There was a conflict of interests – and indeed

of styles – within the family, that came to a crisis now and lasted for generations. Joe Leiter, Levi's only son, was an outlandish character: once when there was a strike at one of his coal mines he hired an armoured train with machine guns on it to carry blackleg labour through the pickets; in the last coach there were a gang of ladies.

Levi Leiter managed to raise two million dollars for his son, and another million for his daughter. The Curzons departed in state for India.

A nanny and a wet-nurse had been engaged for the new baby Cimmie: George Curzon had insisted on interviewing the applicants himself. The wet nurse was sick most of the way across the Bay of Biscay.

Children have imprinted on them patterns they observe from their parents: George and Mary's relationship was enigmatic. They were often professing their love; yet in fact they seem to have been curiously removed from one another. The most telling description of George Curzon has been given by Elinor Glyn, who became his mistress for a number of years after Mary's death. Much of this description might also have applied to Tom at the time he met Cimmie.

> He has always been loved by women, but he has never allowed any individual woman to have the slightest influence on his life ... He likes their society for entirely leisure moments ... He likes them in the spirit in which other men like fine horses or good wine ... They are on a different plane altogether.
>
> He is the most passionate physical lover, but so fastidious that no woman of the lower classes had ever been able to attract him. Since his habit is never to study the real woman, but only to accept the superficial presentation of herself which she wishes him to receive, he is naturally attracted to Americans.
>
> He never gives a woman a single command, and yet each one must be perfectly conscious that she must obey his slightest inclinations. He rules entirely: and when a woman belongs to him he seems to prefer to give her even the raiment which touches her skin, and in every tangible way show absolute possession, while in words avoiding all suggestion of ownership, all ties, all obligations, upon either side. It is extremely curious.

When the Curzons arrived in India they found themselves in a world in which they were almost always on show, almost always surrounded by obsequiousness, almost totally dependent on each other for com-

panionship. They were like royalty but even more solitary, not being members of what are usually large royal families. Mary wrote to her mother that she felt as if she were on a stage; she did not seem to mind this, perhaps because in recent years she had been neglected. George, as was his custom, threw himself into work: he became obsessed with details: he did not delegate responsibility. Mary was still, except when acting like a queen, very much on her own. She and George showed their devotion to each other by writing passionate but hurried notes from opposite ends of Government House. The children were in the hands of nannies, nurserymaids, wet nurses. My aunt Irene remembered of the time when she was three or four:

> we used to drive in a landau with three nurses, two red-liveried men on the box, and two standing up behind. When we were out in the morning in our rickshaws there was an army of attendants including the Viceroy's policeman who usually carried one or two of our broken dolls ...
>
> According to my mother I was a very hard child to handle, whereas Cynthia was a saint. I was often naughty to 'saintly Cim': I kicked her savagely one day and this ended in a fight. I recall my father smacking me and locking me in the bathroom.

There is a mystery about the reign of the Curzons in India. They were in most ways immensely successful: George Curzon pushed most of his administrative reforms through: he embarked on a programme for the restoration of historical monuments which makes him still (1982) the best-loved viceroy in Indian memory. He was not always popular amongst his compatriots: when two Indian servants were murdered by some drunken 9th Lancers and the regiment found itself unable to find the culprits, he stopped the leave of the entire regiment, and for this was booed by the fashionable crowd on Calcutta racecourse. But Mary was always popular in her role of Vicereine; she backed up her husband and made people warm towards him; and his practical achievements were undeniable.

Then after seven years, half way through a second term of office which against precedent had been given to him, George Curzon began to antagonise everyone around him. He wrote letters home which infuriated even his oldest friends in government; at work, he became increasingly intransigent and appeared to be heading for some sort of breakdown. The point at issue was an important technicality of army administration – about how far the army should remain under the direct

orders of the Viceroy. George Curzon was probably correct in his insistence that it should; but his methods of attacking head-on the commander-in-chief, Kitchener, resulted in his own defeat. He resigned; and came home to some sort of ostracism at the hands of his old friends.

Mary found herself in an odd position in all this: as was her custom she manoeuvred ostensibly in support of her husband; but in doing so she seems to have carried on a more or less serious social flirtation with two of his arch enemies – Balfour, the Prime Minister in 1905, and Kitchener himself. She herself became ill: she wrote 'the bell will go, and India will kill me as one of the humble inconsequent lives that go into the foundations of all great works': and it did become the legend that the Indian climate killed her. But in fact she had flourished in India; and she had been for the first time seriously ill when she was on leave in England in 1904. George had then wanted her to remain in England, but she had insisted on rejoining him in India, and there she had again flourished while he had begun to crack up. Then after he had resigned and they were back in England she took to her bed again; and while she and George were once more writing love-notes to each other from the opposite ends of a not-so-enormous house, half way through 1906 and without much explicit cause, she died. The newspapers called it a heart-attack. She was only thirty four. In her last note delivered to her husband by a footman she had apologised for her 'devilish ills' and had said that she feared she was going out of her mind: George had replied that 'nothing else matters except to make my darling well again'; but then he had gone 'crying to bed' without seeing her. As she was dying he had sat beside her and had made notes of the tragedy. Then he set about constructing an elaborate monument to her in the church at Kedleston.

Cimmie was seven when her mother died. George Curzon and his three young daughters (a third, Alexandra, had been born in 1904) settled in their large and now somewhat lifeless houses at 1 Carlton House Terrace in London, and Hackwood Park in Hampshire. These houses were paid for largely by Leiter money which was now in trust to the children – Levi Leiter had died in 1904 and this had been one of the terms of his will – but George Curzon had the use of the income.

Life for the children continued to circulate around nannies, nursery-maids, other servants, horses and dogs. They saw their father at week-ends when they would help him with the tasks that he still insisted on performing himself around the house – holding the ladder for him while he hung pictures; carrying a basket of old bread with which he rubbed out finger-marks on doors. He continued to interview the children's

maids and governesses, questioning them during meals on obscure historical subjects and then appearing appalled when they did not know the answers. He would also turn this sort of teasing against himself: many of the pompous sayings for which he later became notorious ('I didn't know the lower classes had such white skins' when he saw soldiers bathing) were acted out partly as a parody of himself, by which it seems he felt he might protect himself.

As time went on his old friends returned and there were Saturday to Monday parties at Hackwood at which once again were played the games of The Souls that were erudite and childish – charades, clumps; paper-games in which it was required that one wrote verses in a certain style, or composed witty telegrams from given initial letters. The children were brought up on the edge of all this: there were the more straightforward games they themselves played with their father: he would describe a historical scene to them and they had to recognise what it was; there was one particularly lugubrious game which consisted of just writing down the names of all the famous people one could think of beginning with a certain letter.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Cimmie was nearly sixteen. The Belgian Royal Family came to stay at Hackwood as refugees: Cimmie corresponded with the young prince Leopold in a schoolroom code fashionable at the time. She corresponded with young men at the front, and during the next four years they replied to her in hundreds of letters in the tiny, meticulously pencilled scrawls on lined or squared paper that are the memorials of men hunched up in mud or dug-outs. These letters are brave, flirtatious, cheerful, correct: they give off the smell as it were of huge and terrible events and yet say almost nothing. Cimmie had four or five correspondents who seem to have been servants at Hackwood or Carlton House Terrace: there is some sort of straightforwardness about their letters that is missing from the usual upper-class style: 'I think it would take all my strength to bear another winter': also – 'I have never been so happy as I have been during this war: I sometimes think it may be because I at last find that I am of some use in the world. If it were possible to make a wish and have that wish granted, I should just wish for health and strength to continue the fight and to become a billet for the last bullet fired, don't you think that would be a glorious end?'

These men sent her presents ('It is a genuine Sennussi earings and necklace presented to me by one of those ladies in return for a small kindness I was able to render') and she sent to them cigarettes, cakes, clothes, a mouth-organ. Like most young girls (and indeed almost

everyone at the time) she found it difficult to get a hold in her mind of what was going on: people wrote so passively and laconically about horror: no one seemed much interested in stopping it. Cimmie kept a diary on and off during the war: much of it was concerned with the trivia of everyday life. She was still having trouble from the naggings of her sister Irene; she was ashamed of not being more 'constructive' herself. She made her good resolutions: but she felt there was little use in these unless there was:

> a Big Solemn Comprehensive idea that holds you and me and all the world together in one great grand universal scheme ... Religion is the perpetual discovery of that Great Thing Out There ... Marriage has got to be a religious marriage or else it is a splitting up of life; religion and love are most of life, and all the power there is in it; therefore they can't afford to be harnessed in different directions ... I love people loving me more than anything in the world. I am going to try to make people love me more. No one knows how it hurts when someone I adore doesn't adore me. I must say very gratefully it has never happened for long.

Cimmie went to a boarding school at Eastbourne in 1916. There she became the centre of a rather tomboyish, dashing circle of girls. In the winter of 1917–18 she worked as a clerk in the War Office: in 1918 she was on a farm as a landgirl. She liked this because it gave her freedom – far more than would have been allowed to a girl such as her before the war, or indeed after it. Then she did a short welfare course at the London School of Economics including social work in the East End. She maintained her reputation for being somewhat wild, anarchic: a rebel with a conscience.

In 1916 George Curzon had become a member of the War Cabinet: also President of the Anti-Suffrage League. In 1917 he married again, a Mrs Duggan, the widow of a South American millionaire. Cimmie's rebelliousness coincided with her father increasingly being seen as a pillar of the conservative establishment. Cimmie found her relations with him difficult; but she continued to respect much of what he stood for in the way of dedication to duty and hard work. She wrote concerning her confusions about all this to Elinor Glyn, her father's ex-mistress, who had earlier been to her some sort of mother-substitute. Elinor Glyn had had to make her own way in the world: she had been a romantic novelist, a business woman, and a courtesan. She replied:

Get to the real meaning of things and the *real values*. True socialism should be to help conditions so that every child has a chance till it comes to fifteen say, and then sift the chaff from the corn. But lawlessness can never accomplish this, only reason and self-control. Therefore when you say you have 'Bolshevick' feelings examine them. They are probably only the unrest of overstored energy and the evolution of sex, which unconsciously works in every normal and healthy human being. If I were you dear child I would pull right up and examine where I was going and what I *really* wanted to *become*. I *fully* understand that spirit you have and sympathise with it, only it must be turned to fine ends, not disastrous ones. Just think of the *wonderful* power you could have if you wanted to! No hampering poverty or small position: you could be a leader of splendid things if you liked. I would set myself a model to rise to and *nothing* of personal weakness or foolish desires should be allowed to stand in the way of it; make myself into the most beautiful and cultivated and *attractive* young woman in England, so that when the right man came along he would not have to *blink* at certain aspects of me but would worship me as a queen; not take me as a 'jolly girl' or 'good old sport' or because he could not obtain me for his mistress in any other way, as is the attitude that most modern young men approach their choices with. You should *reign* – not be commiserated with as 'Poor dear Cim, what a mess she has made of it!'

There was something in Cimmie, evidently, that might accept being taken as a 'good old sport': perhaps her tomboyishness covered a vulnerability. Many of her boyfriends from childhood and to whom she had written in the war had been killed; it was not unusual for people to protect their feelings by an armour of gaiety. This was what young men in the trenches had done. Cimmie wrote to Lady Desborough whose *Family Journal* had just been published in praise of her two sons Julian and Billy Grenfell who had been killed – 'Words cannot express how I wish I had known those boys: always I have longed to be friends with people like that: I feel I have missed something that perhaps I may never find again.'

Tom Mosley remembered that one of the first times he saw Cimmie was on armistice night when she was at the Ritz Hotel draped in a Union Jack and singing patriotic songs: later that night (in her sister Irene's description) 'she tore round Trafalgar Square with the great crowd setting light to old cars and trucks to the horror of my

father'. Tom himself was filled with sadness at the memory of his dead friends. However, a year later when he met Cimmie at Plymouth what he loved about her perhaps was her exuberant energy. He asked her to marry him. But when he wrote to her of his lunacy, his sufferings, the phantasms attendant on his unrequited love, she did not see, at first, what she might love in him. Perhaps she wished for a less histrionic attack. To his letter quoted at the end of the last chapter she replied:

Hackwood
Basingstoke

I was carried off tonight and didn't have a chance of saying goodnight and thanking you for giving me dinner and wangling me such a wonderfully good seat – so this is just to thank you now very much indeed. I do think it splendid the League making you Chairman of the Campaign Committee, I am glad and shall love to be roped in if there is any mortal thing I could do. Also remember the clubs in Hanwell, and that Phyllis and I are only awaiting further instructions.

And now Dear about your lunacy, don't let it be a disease, don't let it obsess you, don't *please* go on wanting to make me cry or thinking me avengeful – I am really terribly compassionate, and having to hurt you hurts me dreadfully though you mayn't think it. I am not so hard as you imagine or even I make out; I just, well, I can't love you as you love me. Don't think I am merely callous saying that, it seems to me the only thing. I love being with you, I love talking to you, I should adore to be the really glorious friends we could be: please be satisfied with that, I know it's a rotten poor return for all you meant to give me, I am so intensely aware of all you would like to give me, I know how you love me, I am wonder- even awe-struck by it: but Tom, I can't give you anything like that back. Forgive me for saying that my dear ... only I would like to be of comfort to you instead of a disease. But I send love and blessings and again if only you could be devoted to me just as I am to you and not any other way – Goodnight Tom dear. Cim (I am not a humbug and don't think I am asking the impossible).

Tom was not much abashed by this; there has to be a fight if one is to be conqueror. He pursued her by letter to Switzerland, where she had gone to ski.

105 Mount St
21/12/19 W.1.

Cimmie darling,

I expect by now you are with the snow and sun and all beautiful things forgetful of this land of mist and sorrows. I rather love it tho', despite its sadness, perhaps on account of it, especially down here in my beloved Leicestershire where I should always be so happy with horses and hounds if it was not for the other people! I have buried myself for the weekend in the midst of that community which poor Wilde in his arrogant days prescribed as 'the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable'. Middle-aged survivors of the 'unseemly brawl' [the war] which interrupted their activities still carry on melancholy intrigues with the strenuous married women of the Melton district. The famous charms and antics of the latter now appear to me in a more garish light even than of yore. I suppose everything in life is comparative! ...

No politics or clamour for a little while. In detached moments such as these the struggle seems rather distasteful, tho' we revel in it while the fight is on. The incentive of mere personal ambition, except as a means of achieving our conceptions, seems more ludicrous than usual, and the ideas behind it all stand alone as the force that drags us back and will do so until the end.

The House starts again on February 10th but I fear I shall be forced to do a weeks speaking tour in the country about January 20th. I return tomorrow to hear L.G. evade the Irish issue and to compare notes with fellow Bolsheviks. Next session promises embittered controversies as of old ...

Come back soon but not before you want to. I do hope you are very happy out there and that life is wonderful. I am sure it always will be for you because life only gives us but a reflection of ourselves. I think this is the longest letter I have ever written in my ridiculous handwriting. It may carry to you a little of the dull things and a little of the joyous things that occupy me in this interval of existence if nothing of the things to which I look beyond it.

Tom

So long as Tom talked of 'the dull things' Cimmie could reply in kind:

So dreadfully sorry not to have answered your letter before really very very apologetic as I loved getting it and have meant to write and say so for days but always there seems something to be done ...

And so on. But then, a week or so later, Tom returned to the attack.

> I do so want you to marry me you see as I tried to explain that last wonderful night at the fancy party. I am tired of next session and all its dull things and duller people and only want to love you – perhaps this bores you – I cannot tell – it is for you to settle but please do so *quickly*! My life has been such a hustle that I seem to have acquired the habit and people in a hurry are usually unpleasant to others ... Write and tell me what you feel about it all and I only pray that this and every other decision in your life will bring you happiness which is all that matters to me ...

But then, Cimmie was immediately on the defensive again.

> Darling child, don't be tired about next Session, please, and don't be unhappy, but I am very very sorry, I don't want to marry you. I hate just putting it like that, it seems so horrid, but you said you were an impatient person and I must let you know. Don't think the idea of you loving me bores me (as you say) you never would bore me and I loved getting to know you and talking to you. But I am sad that I should make you sad now whereas I only so much wanted to help and make you happy. *Please* be happy and full of interest in your job and let me know that my being unable to love you in the way you want isn't going to spoil things for you between us ...

'Being unable to love you in the way you want' probably included a reluctance on Cimmie's part to risk herself in the area in which she knew Tom was renowned. She was safe so long as she remained in Switzerland. But when she was back in England, Tom seems to have brought the style of his pursuit as it were down to earth. He arranged for Cimmie to stay in Leicestershire and go hunting with him. After this he wrote:

> Funny Baby, Please do not be cross or distressed with me for tonight's few moments or above all frightened ever of me, because I would rather anything than ever hurt you for a single instant. I fear that side of me is very vital and strong and indeed if it was not I should not be much use in this life of struggle! But I do love you with all the strength of the other side, which is the only side that matters and which I have never given to any other woman.
>
> My real love for you will always prevent the original wild animal hurting or distressing you because in me the spirit always wins when

it is interested or affected. How crudely expressed: but you will understand, and I am so anxious that you shall never be alarmed or weary with me. I adored being with you in the places that I love – and I adore you – all of me does!!

Tom

Cimmie was a practical, sensuous person and she seems to have adored Tom and never to have ceased from adoring him once her sexuality was aroused. Soon he was writing to her – from his bachelor apartment, and in a note now torn down the middle but still as it were carefully legible:

His own darling Cim ...
It occurred to me that Molyneux might possibly let me his flat for us to go there in the day time while he is away. If you know him well enough will you ask him, as this place is alright for Tom but not very congenial for his one. He feels so lonely tonight! It is all wrong!

Bless her. X.

By March 26th 1920 they were engaged.

CHAPTER 3

Marriage and Politics

Tom and Cimmie were married on May 11th 1920 in the Chapel Royal, St James's. Cimmie had wanted a quiet wedding: the Chapel Royal, in the words of a contemporary newspaper, was 'so small that the guests scarcely have room even to study one another's gowns – but the privilege of being married in this building is a highly prized favour'. King George and Queen Mary were present, as were the King and Queen of the Belgians, who had been flown across the channel in two two-seater aeroplanes specially for the occasion. Outside the Chapel there was such a crowd that it had to be held back by police. Cimmie's wedding dress had a design of green leaves in it, in defiance of a superstition that green at a wedding was unlucky: there was also a superstition that it was unlucky to be married in May. Cimmie herself chose the music: during the handing-over of the ring the *Liebestod* from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* was played; though the organist, a newspaper reported, did his best to make it inaudible. Another newspaper commented that 'Mr Oswald Mosley, the bridegroom, was in the happy position of arousing little attention'. Photographs of him at the wedding show him, almost without exception, like an actor acknowledging the applause of a crowd. Cimmie's younger sister wrote to her 'You must tell Tom for the sake of his political career to put on a less footling expression when photographed'.

Before the wedding there had been one or two voices advising Cimmie not to rush in too quickly. A war-time boyfriend wrote 'There is a reason for knowing your Tom very thoroughly, but this is best discussed with a married woman'. But Tom himself, it seems, had already discussed this sort of thing with Cimmie. Cimmie had wondered what her father would make of the engagement; in the event he was relieved at her choice of Tom, since he knew of what were only

half jokingly called her 'bolshevick' tendencies. He wrote to his wife Grace 'It turns out he is quite independent – he has practically severed himself from his father who is a spendthrift ... He did not even know that Cim was an heiress'. For the rest there were just hundreds of letters saying how perfect everything was. Nancy Astor wrote 'This is just a line of real love and I do love Tom too. You will be *just* the kind of wife he needs and wants. I feel he must have a great soul, or he would never have asked you to share it.' Elinor Glyn wrote to Cimmie 'One day you will rule England.'

They went for their honeymoon to Portofino, in Italy. There Cimmie taught Tom how to swim; before, he had had a terror of putting his head under water. (He wrote in his autobiography that he considered this due to his having been nearly smothered at birth, which was not in line with his view that early traumas had had no effect on him). About the house where he and Cimmie stayed he wrote – 'Both Dante and Napoleon had slept in the mediaeval fortress; across the lovely bay you could see at Spezia the tragic water wine-dark with Shelley's drowning; along the heights which linked Portofino with Rapallo strode Nietzsche in the ecstasy of writing Zarathustra; Cimmie and I followed the same route more prosaically riding donkeys'.

Cimmie's two sisters Irene (sometimes called Nina) and Alexandra (always called Baba) felt, in their different styles, an almost personal involvement in the wedding and with the honeymoon couple. Irene, aged twenty-four and unmarried, wrote immediately after Cimmie and Tom had left the reception at Carlton House Terrace:

> My 2 'tweets' Tim and Tom
>
> This is a tiny little breath of a lonely house left behind: thinking of you so hard: my thoughts will fly to you both tonight with all the prayers and wonder and sacredness that surround that little wedding-ring – my sweet Cim. May all the stars twinkle and bless you tonight and all the divine fresh green trees and flowers whisper spring – spring – spring – with your two hearts.
>
> Your Nina

And Baba, a schoolgirl of sixteen, wrote after she had heard from Cimmie at Portofino:

> My most pessus darling Tim,
> I am *so so* happy that it has turned out so wonderful as I have thought about you such a lot and longed for it to be like a perfect dream. I am just living for the time for you to come back ...

For Tom his honeymoon was the beginning of the twelve years of his life during which, he wrote later, 'the summits of private happiness were balanced by the heights of public acclaim'. He not only loved Cimmie: he had seen her as someone with whom in partnership he might set out to alter the world. Cimmie had felt him as her child when she had been reluctant to marry him: she now also felt him as her conqueror. And she too had been brought up to think that in such a partnership she might alter the world.

What is striking about Tom's early years in Parliament is that he was on the 'liberal' or progressive side in almost every issue of any importance. From the first he saw that the coalition government under Lloyd George which had been elected to 'make a land fit for heroes to live in' had little intention of trying to do so: elderly men who had not been in the war were making a country profitable to themselves. Tom saw himself as the champion of the young versus the old: he became President of a body called The League of Youth and Social Progress: but even this, he found, was in fact run by 'a smooth and smug little Liberal ... typical of the middle-aged politicians who in each generation exploit youth.' He could use his talent for vituperation however as a speaker on its platforms: in his inaugural address as chairman he declaimed – 'Beware lest old age steal back and rob you of the reward ... lest the old dead men with their old dead minds embalmed in the tombs of the past creep back to dominate your new age, cleansed of their mistakes in the blood of your generation.' Such violence of phraseology got him publicity: he was still not at this time an impressive speaker when controlled.

His more serious efforts were to do with his championing of the new League of Nations: he cared above all about means for preserving peace. He had already been made Chairman of the Campaign Committee in England to publicise the League: he made speeches up and down the country. His mentor in this work was Lord Robert Cecil, the British representative at the League; of whom Tom later wrote (probably his highest recorded compliment about any living politician) 'he was nearly a great man and he was certainly a good man; possibly as great a man as so good a man can be'. Together in Parliament they condemned the British annexation of a former German island in the Pacific for the sake of its phosphate deposits: Tom declared this represented 'the worst days of predatory imperialism'. He described General Dyer's slaughter of Indian civilians at Amritsar as an example of 'Prussian frightfulness inspired by racism'. When British troops were used against the Bolsheviks in Russia he protested – 'It went to my heart to think of

£100,000,000 being spent in Russia supporting a mere adventure while the unemployed are trying to keep a family on 15s a week.' Then in 1923 when Mussolini's troops occupied the Greek island of Corfu he called for the League of Nations to impose sanctions against Italy. His whole political life, he wrote later, was 'predetermined by this almost religious conviction – to prevent a recurrence of war'. He felt that this might be done by the refusal by Britain to become involved in any aggression or even adventures; and by Britain's backing all internationally controlled efforts to prevent aggression by others. About the means necessary to do this he did have a different view from Robert Cecil: the latter had an almost mystical trust in the triumph of human reason so long as conflicts of opinion could be aired. Tom at this time had no illusions that even if a majority of nations agreed on some solution to a conflict, this might not have to be imposed on a minority by at least a show of force. In later years he himself came to have an almost mystical belief in his own powers of reasoning: but by then there were fewer illusions about the efficacy of the use of force.

The issue however with which Tom became most notoriously embroiled during his early years in Parliament was that of Ireland. After the 1918 election the Irish MPs elected to Westminster had unilaterally declared Ireland to be a republic: the Irish Republican Army was formed to gain independence from Britain by force. By 1920 the IRA were in control of much of the country: Lloyd George chose not to fight back openly – this might have alarmed public opinion – but rather to organise, or allow to be organised, gangs of mercenaries who would take on the IRA in their own style. These toughs became known as the Black and Tans from the colour of their uniforms: they found themselves engaged in a prototype of modern guerrilla warfare in which there were atrocities on both sides – especially the use of torture to extract information. Tom, in Parliament, railed against the government both for its responsibility for the Black and Tans and its denial of responsibility: the government was engaged in activities like 'the pogroms of the barbarous slav': it had 'denials on its lips and blood on its hands'. He was booed and jeered by Conservative MPs: he replied that he was 'unperturbed by the monosyllabic interjections of the otherwise inarticulate'. On November 3rd 1920 he left the Conservative benches and sat with the Independents: he had lasted as even a nominal member of the Tory establishment for less than two years.

The Irish nationalist leader T. P. O'Connor wrote later to Cimmie – 'I regard him as the man who really began the break-up of the Black and Tan savagery'.

Tom had made his mark in Parliament as someone who would fight for the rights of the oppressed and underprivileged: but he was in a position of being able to object to government callousness and to government duplicity because he himself was only a critic and he was not in a position of power. He was outraged at the methods of the Black and Tans not only because they were wicked (he approved of the controlled use of force to prevent aggression elsewhere) but because they were stupid: in the event, they aroused support for the IRA. But still, what else was to be done? He suggested when not in a vituperative mood that the Government should take personal responsibility for the fight against the IRA by means of a properly organised Intelligence Service: thus it 'should' be possible to round up the 'murder gangs' without recourse to one's own terrorism. But within the word 'should' there lies all the difference between those who have power and those who do not. Tom, in later life, when faced with a form of violence against himself, felt it right to reply in some sort of kind – even to become involved in inevitable duplicity.

Tom's sitting on the opposition benches in the House of Commons meant that he fell out with most of the old men who had earlier befriended him. He seemed to relish attacking the men at the top: he accused Winston Churchill, whom he saw as being responsible for the attack on Russia, of 'borrowing his principles from Prussia ... but my complaint is that he is an ineffectual Prussian ... it is no good keeping a private Napoleon if he is always defeated'. He said of the editor of the *Observer*, James Garvin, that he was a 'musical doormat which plays "See The Conquering Hero Comes" whenever Mr Lloyd George wipes his boots upon it.'

He became involved in attempts to form a Centre Party which would stand against the corruption and inefficiency of Lloyd George's Coalition and might draw support from both Tory and Liberal malcontents and even Labour. He wrote to Robert Cecil in April 1921 –

> A real opportunity presents itself for a confederation of reasonable men to advance with a definite proposal for the reorganisation of our industrial system upon a durable basis and a concurrent revision of the financial chaos ... The trouble is we are so immersed in the detail of everyday existence that we lose the *a priori* mind – the only attribute in the world that matters ... One loses entirely the vision splendid of politics within the four walls of the H of C. It was so much easier in the past with such long intervals for dreams!

Lord Cowdray, the industrialist, was approached, and gave an undertaking that in certain circumstances he would provide money for a Centre Party. Lord Grey, the Liberal Foreign Secretary at the outbreak of war, was asked if he would emerge from his retirement and be its leader. Cimmie and a dozen other wives of interested politicians wrote to him – 'We see in your return to public life the best hope of an effective rallying together ... of all the stable progressive elements in the country'. But Tom found, as he found in later life repeatedly, that however much men might like to talk about new alignments of forces in the play-grounds of the political arena, their attitudes usually changed when anything more than talk was proposed. Lord Grey replied:

> Even if I were not under the disabilities of bad sight and of being in the House of Lords I should feel that the possible results of my taking an active part in public affairs are being greatly overestimated by my friends. I do not believe that any remedy for the present discontent is to be found in politics, but I will not enter upon a discussion of that large question now ...

And then Robert Cecil himself, when Tom approached him to be leader ('I am convinced it lies within your power to change the whole course of the history of the decade') replied:

> I think we should go on as heretofore saying as little as we can about our personal position and continuing to hammer the Govt and set up our alternative policy. Believe me it is facts that count in politics and they seem more and more going against the Govt ... It is no use chopping and changing, and until I see a very clear advantage in moving again I think it would be better to stick where I am. I have practically dropped the word 'conservative' ...

Years later Tom wrote of Robert Cecil that he 'embodied the mature, experienced and traditional wisdom of statesmanship not only in mind, but in the physical presence of an age-old eagle whose hooded eyes brooded on the follies of men while they still held the light of a further and beneficent vision.' Of Lord Grey he wrote – 'I always found him a singularly tedious and ineffective figure.' He liked Robert Cecil and he did not like Lord Grey. But whatever his personal predilections, he was learning, for the first of many times, that if one wants to pursue 'the vision splendid of politics', it is likely that one finds oneself at the head of the field alone.

The fact that Tom was breaking away more and more from his conservative and establishment background meant that he and Cimmie found their relations increasingly strained with her father George Curzon. Curzon had become Foreign Secretary in 1919; but such was Lloyd George's insistence on keeping most of the strings of foreign policy in his own hands (Curzon took responsibility for Asian affairs) that on the issues about which Tom at first was outspoken he and his father-in-law seldom found it necessary to clash. However Curzon's tentative approval of Tom as a son-in-law became, over the Irish question, tinged with alarm. His wife Grace wrote to him 'What a fool Tom Mosley is making of himself! If he goes on you should talk to him.' But then when George Curzon tried to be fatherly to his daughter and his son-in-law he ran into further difficulties. To one invitation to a very grand dinner at Carlton House Terrace Tom's secretary replied – 'Dear Lord Curzon, Mr Mosley asks me to say that he and the wife will be glad to dine with you and the King and Queen on the 15th prox.' Lord Curzon replied to his daughter in his own handwriting in a letter which began 'In the first place your secretary should address me, if he must address me at all, as My Lord . . .' and continued with pages of detailed instructions about correct modes of address and the answering of invitations. Tom remarked that this information was 'most useful'.

But the chief matter of contention between father and daughter and son-in-law was about money. After Mary Curzon's death in 1906 her Leiter money was held in trust for her children. George Curzon was able to get hold of the income from this on the grounds of his providing suitable homes for the children; but then, under the terms of Levi Leiter's will, when the children came of age the income was supposed to go direct to them. Irene, at twenty one, had demanded that she should have her money: her father had protested. Cimmie, even after her marriage, had for a time left part of her income with her father because it seemed to her unfortunate that he still had comparatively little money of his own to spare (his father Lord Scarsdale had died in 1916 but most of the Scarsdale family money went into the upkeep of the estate at Kedleston). But now, in 1921, Cimmie claimed the whole of her income; probably because Tom had got into financial difficulties in Harrow. When local newspapers had given up printing his speeches about Ireland he had himself bought one of the papers in order to air his views: later the paper had failed, and there were debts. George Curzon protested about Cim's proposal to claim her money: Cimmie wrote him a letter in which (he reported to his wife) she called his attitude 'mean, petty, unwarrantable, unaccountable and incompre-

hensible'. George Curzon replied that he was 'unwilling to continue any controversy on the matter'. Relations remained broken off. When in 1925 George Curzon was dying, he was still not on speaking terms with his two elder daughters. Irene, when she went to make her peace with him, was turned away at the door by a footman (she would tell this story in later years with much distress: she professed an undying love and respect for her father). There is no record of Cimmie having got as far as the door.

Tom was also engaged in cutting himself off from his own past and his family. His grandfather whom he had loved had died in 1915: his father had nominally inherited the Rolleston estate, but his grandfather had arranged that much of the money bypassed his son and went straight to Tom. In 1919 Tom persuaded his father to put Rolleston up for sale 'foreseeing the ruin of agriculture which politics were bringing, and feeling that I could best serve the country in a political life at Westminster'. Tom claimed that this was 'a terrible uprooting causing me much sorrow at the time': but it was a deliberate decision to sell what had been built up by past generations and with an eye to the future, for the sake of Tom's short-term political advantage. Rolleston was bought by a developer and pulled down. By the time Tom died in 1980 there were very few family heirlooms left from what had once been the admittedly rather hollow magnificence of Rolleston.

Cimmie and Tom were acting instinctively, emotionally, in this cutting-off from their pasts. Tom even sold his hunters and his polo ponies: he wrote 'politics had become for me the overriding interest and required singlemindedness'. He wrote of Cimmie that she 'reacted strongly against the splendours of Conservatism so faithfully reflected in her early surroundings, and this led her to seek close contact with the mass of the people and to prefer simplicity in her own home'. But at no stage of their life did this claim make much sense: it was not that from now on they hob-nobbed single-mindedly with the working class, but that they substituted one smart social set that they found boring for an even smarter one that they did not. This was a time when they began to go abroad for many of their social amusements to France and to Italy.

The social life by which Tom and Cimmie were taken up at this time was what nowadays might be called international jet-set. Tom wrote in his autobiography – 'What was the purpose of it all, this going into society? Apart from fun, which is always worthwhile so long as you have the time, meeting people is clearly valuable, particularly people with influence in divers spheres ... There was too the "open sesame" into the world of culture, literature, music and art ... It was a university

of charm, where a young man could encounter a refinement of sophistication whose acquisition could be some permanent passport in a varied and variable world.'

Tom described the style of this 'university of charm'. The hostesses in the cities of Europe during the nineteen twenties were mostly American: they had the money. In Paris there was Elsie de Wolfe, who had 'made a considerable fortune in New York as an interior decorator'. On Sundays she usually had 'twenty or thirty people of all nationalities and professions to luncheon or dinner ... Miss de Wolfe's conversation was distinguished by immense vivacity rather than intellectual content ... When nearly ninety she was still doing what she called her morning exercises which consisted of being flung about by two powerful men of ballet dancer physique. Her gentler entourage included two well-known characters of the period called Johnny and Tony who were always at festive board and had a more delicate appreciation of haute couture than of high politics.' Then in Rome and Venice there was Princess Jane di San Faustino, another American, who 'regaled the fashion world with the extremities of scandal floodlit by her unfailing and eccentric humour'. She would sit at the beach at Venice and 'unnerve' newcomers with some 'searing comment' or her 'basilisk stare'. She would tell the story of her husband who, when he left her, had 'signalled the coachman to stop, teed up on the kerbstone as if for a golfshot, and hit her as hard as he could over the head with his umbrella'.

Compared to these, the leading London hostesses of the time – Lady Cunard, Lady Colefax, Mrs Ronnie Greville – might indeed have seemed rather tame.

Tom would explain that he saw social life as some sort of antidote, or balance, to what might have otherwise become the grim and overriding obsessions of politics. What was required, he used to say, was a 'Ganzheit' (wholeness) for the attainment of 'the complete man'. But the style of people in Tom's and Cimmie's social world does not seem to have been very different from that of politicians: there was more wit, perhaps: but this was still the Proustian world of Paris or Venice in which personal relationships, even love, were matters of intrigue, conquest, possession, power; everyone was in the business of becoming one up on everyone else. Certainly there seems to have been little in it of music, literature, art: not much of that austere standing back by which Proust transmuted what was tawdry into beauty.

What these *salons* were useful for, of course, was the business of men picking up women. Tom had a phrase for this – 'flushing the covers'

– a reference to partridge or pheasant shooting, in which birds are put up by beaters. There are different opinions about how long Tom was faithful to Cimmie after their marriage: her sisters imagined possibly a few years: Tom's second wife, Diana, suggested a few months. He would not have remained faithful for long while moving in this café-society world: what would have been the point? Talk of art and literature was known as being a cover under which lurked the availability of young married women. Another form of camouflage was that provided by the life of an MP. As one of the wits in Tom's entourage put it – What other job gives one such a valid excuse to be away from home night after night till 1 am?

Tom had embarked on his social and political life as a conqueror: it seems to have been agreed by both him and Cimmie that their marriage should in some sense spur him on – she as well as he wanted him to do 'great things'. But then what is this style of 'greatness'? And what is the style of a wife who has pledged herself to support her husband thus faithfully?

CHAPTER 4

Love Letters

Cimmie's first child, a girl, was born on February 25th 1921. She was christened Vivien Elisabeth. The nanny that came to look after her had been Cimmie's nurserymaid in India. Nanny Hyslop stayed with the family in one capacity or another for over fifty years.

Cimmie and Tom had settled into a house in London – 8 Smith Square – within easy reach of the Houses of Parliament. For weekends and holidays they rented houses in the country or abroad. In the summer of 1921 Nanny and Vivien were in Devon while Tom and Cimmie were in Scotland: in 1922 they were on the Norfolk coast while Tom and Cimmie were in Venice. In the winter of 1922-23 the family were together in a house, Lou Mas, in the south of France, on Cap Ferrat near Nice. Tom had to leave early to go home to speak in Parliament about a crisis in Mesopotamia: Cimmie stayed behind with Nanny and Vivien and her sister Baba who had come to stay. Cimmie was five months pregnant again and had been told to rest. This was the first time that Tom and Cimmie had been away from each other since their marriage for more than two nights. During the ten days that they were apart they each wrote to the other almost every day: Cimmie's first letter to Tom had been written even before he had left: Tom's first letter to Cimmie was written in the train so that he could post it at his first stop at Cannes. The letters talk of their love; their dependence on each other. Tom told the story much later to his second wife Diana that during this time when Cimmie was pregnant he was having an affair with a mutual friend with whom they had been in Venice the previous summer: Cimmie had learned about this and it had caused her upset; also upset (this was Tom's theory) to the child. This might have happened after the time of the letters. The child Cimmie was pregnant with, was myself.

I have cut some of the repetitions: but these letters show, as nothing

else can, the peculiarities of the relationship between Tom and Cimmie; also something of the style of social life at the time.

Monday 12 February am. Lou Mas.

My beloved precious beloved
You haven't gone yet but my heart is aching so I write now so as for you to get a lett from me soon soon after you get back.
Be happy, be happy I do love you so frightfully I want you to miss me but to be happy too. Will be back soon and till then kiss you every morning every night, think of you every moment.
Bless you my precious I do love you so.
Kisses and love and love and kisses from

Your own Tim

Monday 12th February. Cannes

My own darling

I am so terribly unhappy at leaving you – nothing would have made me go if I had realised what it meant and nothing will again. Please, please do not be too sad and look after your wonderful darling self for your T who adores you. I never understood before I left you on the platform quite how much I loved you. You have brought all the beauty and holiness and wonder with you that my life has ever known or ever will know – something apart from – higher – and yet wonderfully interwoven with my stormy existence – all that has rendered it possible. Come back to me soon my beloved.

Tom.

Monday 12th February pm. Lou Mas.

My sweetheart, I hope I didn't make you too unhappy when you went off. It just suddenly seemed too awful and my heart nearly broke. I don't know really how I shall get through the next week. I am so utterly dependent on you, you don't know how my every thought is of you, I really have no 'me' to speak of, only *you you you*: a *you* to adore, a *you* to look after, a *you* I admire, a *you* that fills my entire horizon. You have made such a difference to my life – filling it completely – making it *so* happy, blissfully happy and content – content in having found someone really big, really worthwhile, a life and a person worthy of one's whole endeavours and furthest effort. I do hope I give you back a little of the ... [rest of the letter missing].

Tuesday February 13th Calais.

My own darling,

Afraid missed Paris letter as train did not get there until 10 and went on eleven – Tommy still in bed and by time he had dressed was going on. Now only short let as feeling very sick – train rocking terribly – if it is rough on channel disaster may ensue. Already his insistent and plaintive cries of woe have evoked the compassion of fellow voyagers. Truly so terribly wretched and depressed without my one – such lonely little meals and sad feeling bring home to me every moment how much you have become to me in all the little as well as the big things in life. I nearly jumped off the train when she milked out and would have done so if others had not been there to think was too foolish. Shall be so mis without you but terribly realise how much you mean. Please do not be too unhappy but go on loving your adoring Tom and get well and strong to have a lovely time in a few days when you get back.

Tom X for Mum x for baby.

Train very good for Odie [Nanny] and baby: she would be very comfortable at other end of single compartment, they are much better than double.

Tuesday February 13th Lou Mas.

Blessed heart of mine, I can't tell you what your beloved letter has just given to me such a joy, such a love and such aching tears – Oh Bill I do miss you so. Perhaps almost it's a good thing you went away tho' you must not ever ever again – coz without you here I am overwhelmed by how much you mean to me: but my sweet, I am also sadly conscious of how little I let you know how *infinitely* much you *do* mean.

Dear heart I am so sorry for the way I harry and worry you – have made too high a mountain out of the molehills of your faults and let them so much exclude the sweet shining light of your love and darlingness. No one has ever had a sweeter man an I do appreciate everything, all you give me. I have been silly and overwrought and I am sure awfully difficult – no doubt thoughtless things you never dreamt I'd notice or mind well I have minded and have been mis and hurt and hopelessly grumpy. I have let you get the capacity to hurt me more easily than the capacity to please – No – that is too far, but anyway I have been a bit upside down tho' never for one instant loving you less. All the time the only great integral vital thing in the

whole world that matters to me is You, my loving You, You loving me – it's so wonderful and beautiful and from now on I am going to make so much better use of it. Help me will you my sweet. I am now feeling awfully well, awfully resolute, intensely sorry for my shortcomings and failures – aching to be back with you to do anything I can. I wish I could explain better. I feel we have a good bit been box and cox – very often when you have been sweet and charming to me, or when you have wanted gaiety from me, or when you have wanted to talk serious matters with me, I have still been grieving over some row or trouble we've had and which you have already completely forgotten. I have resented you forgetting what seemed to me so easily – not realising that maybe I oughtn't to have, as it were, wallowed in being hurt. I have been too sensitive and have lost elasticity in recovering.

I really have been abnormal about everything connected with you – too proud too intricate too naked too introspective too violent. The beauty the peace the greatness the real sympathy between us so far and away miles and miles transcends the pettifogging puerile unnecessary squabbles. Let's have no more of them. You do your part will you as sometimes my pet it is your own sweet fault. And I swear I will do mine. I look forward so much to coming back to you and the time to come, peaceful happy unclouded. I wonder however the seven days will pass that are left here.

It is too bad, weather perfection and just when you have gone. I am out of doors in the deck chair writing this on my knee – we go Nice this afternoon shopping. It's really broiling. Tomorrow we start at 10 the Colefax expedition to go to St Paul and Grasse. Thurs I take Baba to Cannes and leave her with the Coates – Lady Rock has just written to Bab asking her and us to dine one night. We are going to ring up and ask if she will give us lunch Thurs instead. Nothing more so far except going with Connie to see her house. I have got all the necessaries for our journey Tuesday.

My beloved one I think of your sweet woolly head and the corner of your eye where I love to kiss – and how sweet you look in your new smart shirts, in your chic black 'smoking'. Dicks has just been up. She had two very exciting new engagements, at least one dullish, Mary Pease to a Mr Lubbock: the other thrilling to me, I wish you were here to guess – about the only girl friend I have left – one you like very much – can you guess –

Darling I wonder whether you will ever ever wade through all this. Oh I am so lucky to be married to you my precious fellow – you are

so miles and away above and beyond all others – I am so privileged to be sharing in that wonderful star of yours –
Never doubt yourself. Never doubt me for one second.
You will never fail you. I will never fail you.
How I long to touch you and hear your voice.
Infinite love and a kiss on your dear wicked mouth
from you own Tim

Tuesday night 11pm. Smithers [8 Smith Sq]
My own darling fellow,

Back in Turtle land after many adventures – Dined at the House with M. Wood who has been made Liberal whip under Phillipps chief whip in place of Hogge sacked for intruguing with L.G. – great uproar in Lib circles. Oh he is so lonely in Sweet Smithers without his one and does long for her return. I have become so accustomed to having you with me that I am so lost and foolish without you in addition to such ache in heart. My crossing was perfect and who should be on the boat but old Bob [Cecil] with P. Baker [Philip Noel-Baker] from Lausanne – great political talks – he asked me what I was going to do and I replied with truth I did not know. Feels a lost mut [drawing of an animal like a sheep with the tail crossed out] tail should not be there as he left it behind at Cap Ferrat. Please soon take up her little crook.

I have talked to Whitly and expect to speak tomorrow or Monday – terrible lot of requests for me to speak etc – not much for you, and those I am refusing. Bless you my own beautiful treasure. I do so miss my wonder one and her baby. X for Mum x for baby. So tired and lonely in bye [another drawing of an animal] Tiny mut in big pen all alone. Does love her.

Wednesday Lou Mas.
My darling one I am so bitterly disappointed – no lett from you today. I so badly wanted one on my return from Cannes. I felt so dreadfully lonely and was so sure one would be waiting on the hall table. Naughty puss you can't have posted one in either Paris or Calais or it surely would have been here by now. Write me all you can belovedest – it's all I have of you to carry me on and altho' I promise you I am feeling very well and quite serene-ish still, I am a bit desolate. Now *all* alone. I think and think of you and us 2 and have remembered so many little funny sweet episodes in our life together that I

had quite forgotten for the while. Now I'll tell you about yesterday and today.

Well yesterday Colefax and a nice little old man (55 to 60-ish) called Johnson started off in one car Baba and I in another, and went to St Paul (right behind Cagnes) where a large grey Rolls Royce was already drawn up belonging to Kennard; he then joined on to us we saw a church and town and then went on to Grasse stopping on the road for a picnic lunch. Lovely lovely day, magnificent scenery. At Grasse we went over the scent factory – Oh, I never knew before how scent was made it's revolting and interesting. We emerged after ½ an hour smelling like civet cats. Then we went to see the Croisset villa (daughter just married Charles de Noailles) its supposed to be wonderful. I have never contemplated any such atrocity.

We came back a splendid road through divine little old towns and gorgeous scenery. Had tea in Nice then home. Box left today for Florence.

Now I am writing in bed and wondering how ever I shall get through the days that remain. I am bored and longing to have you here oh my sweetheart if only you could just walk in now and start going to bed I could put my arms around your neck and kiss you. I want to touch you so, and have you up against me. Blessed heart I wonder if you acutely miss me as I do you, if you have an ache all the time.

8 Smith Square. S.W.1
Wednesday

My own Darling,

He has just got the sweetest letter of all his life – thank you so much – it nearly broke my heart when she milked out – do hope now a little bet – only a week more today and five days only when you get it.

Just been to the House – fine bout between Lady M.P. [Lady Astor] and J. Jones [Labour member]. Opening rounds with references to J.J.'s inveterate consumption of spirits, and counters re her making money through illicit whisky selling. N.A. finally takes the count with peach of a punch as follows – The Speaker: Millionaires are useful people – N.A.: Hear hear! – J.J.: They have been some use to you! The worst day we've had for weeks, fog and cold terrible. Tiny T very depressed and longing for the return of his precious fellow. All love in world for his beloved.

Thursday 15th February. Lou Mas.

My own sweetheart, it's already 24 hours longer than I have ever been away from you before. I do wish you hadn't had to go but I am longing to hear from you whether or not you really think you were right in leaving: are you going to speak or take any part? I hope you will be able to, but my sweet remember if you can't be good be careful: *no* nasty personal allusions to Pa.

Am dreadfully disappointed no lett *all* yesterday and none this morning's post. Now we are just off to Cannes where I leave Baba after lunching with Rocks.

Hope so much there will be one waiting when I get back.

Will tell you about yesterday and today when I write tonight. Poor Tinkie *all* alone at Lou Mas.

My belovedest I love you so.

Blessings from your own Tim

Friday 16th February. House of Commons.

My own darling,

Just got the let which she wrote prior to his departure – delayed owing inadequate stamping & 6d to pay!! Rather glad he came back – speech apparently *immense success*. Scores of fervent congratulations and cheers. R. MacDonald came up and said he so wanted to talk to me in his room. So look out for bolshie boy in red tie when you return. Just a few quips at Marquis [Curzon] which were greatly appreciated. Please not too cross – not too bad! Great hurry for post. Elsa Maxwell in London. Very bored with everything except his Tim. Only thing in world that matters to him.

My own darling. X.

Friday AM. Lou Mas.

My sweetheart pet, so happy and glad to have your lets at last. Was wanting them so badly nearly burst all Wed: all Thurs no line: then Fri morning 2 at once the Calais one and the Smithers. Precious one they have make me so happy tho' have made me ache ache ache for you. I do miss you *too* terribly and wish with all my heart you had jumped out of the train. She couldn't help her milk out.

His letts are so *sweet* she does treasure them so. She'll look after his tail so carefully and bring it home. Poor lonely fellow in the big bed. Darling one can't help saying she is glad he is missing her, is glad he finds a gap instead of her fussing around.

How nice for you meeting Bob, was he very Tory. Sidney Greville

has just been up to say goodbye he leaves Maryland tomorrow for Monte and goes home Wed. I am just going to Rosemary now to see Dicks before she goes off to Genoa to join Con and to get Evelyn's address to write to her. Having lunch early going into Nice for 'grand shopping'. Joan coming to tea then lonely evening doing bills and accounts.

This is just before I go to sleep. Have just read all your letts over again my Billy boy you are too darling for words I am so lucky to have such a sweet one for a husband. So many of the little things you write, the little divine things, the drawings, every single sweet thought, every touch, is treasured so passionately – by me. The little 'you and I' touches, the 'muts', and the 'tiny fellow in the big bye': I am so glad we are like we are and not just ordinary hus and wife. I *do* appreciate you so – your tenderness and un-ordinariness about things that matter so much to me.

Saturday 17th Febuary. White's.

My own darling,

I expect this will be the last let you get before you jump on to the Blue Train and are wafted away from flowers and sun to the dingy little retreat where adoring Tomby awaits his beloved fellow. Just had a lovely lunch all by himself and is settling down for a *lonely* weekend – won't see a soul until Monday – poor lamb. Last night Oggie [Olga Lynn] had a very amusing dinner party of about 20 – usual people with additions of Maxine Elliott, Gladys Cooper type, wonderful shouts: Viola Tree funnier than you would believe. A new stunt – 'learning to skate'. Napier Alington and Lois did some dances and everyone was at very zenith of form. Did so long to see his round-eyed one honking out her pleasure or looking in pawky disapproval like a shocked baby as occasion might arise. A new and enchanting lyric has taken our more esoteric circles by storm – as follows, to the tune of the Old Pink Lady Valse –

A wonderful bird is the pell-i-can
His beak holds as much as his belly can
Some say that he can pass
This beak right up his ass
But I'm damned if I see how the hell-he-can!

The evening was appropriately concluded by Mr W Rummel rendering the 'Entry of the Gods into Valhalla' and the rest of his concert programme in Nice. Such fun; but I did so want his pretty one to enjoy it too. Oggie says we will have another when you come

back *if you like*. Tomby thinks he ought to be rather political for a bit as things are developing. Has enjoyed this little bit of gaiety; as having spoken, could do no more. Lots more multi-congratulations. But *he* thought he was bad: what does *she* think?

Saturday evening. Lou Mas.

Belovedest, isn't it thrilling this will be almost the last letter I will be able to write to you. It won't go till tomorrow Sunday and you will get it the very day before I at long long last get back to you. I will write just one more Monday for you to get Wed morning as really I couldn't bear to let a day go by without writing to you. I wonder if you have been bored by my endless screeds – I have *had* to write tho' it has appeased a little my loneliness. I have loved sort of getting into contact with you as it seems. Fancy I have written practically twice a day every day since you left. I wonder if you got them all? Did you get the one I wrote even before you had left? You cannot imagine my loneliness and want of you – I literally have felt all these days that there has been 'no spirit left in me' no resilience, no capacity for enjoyment; only aching void, the French word 'lasse'. I don't mean physical health at all, as I really am feeling awfully well, awfully rested and keen to get back, I know I am quite collected and serene and more vital than I have been for months – it's just YOU YOU YOU I must have – I must have. Quite honestly if you died (as I don't contemplate anything else on heaven or earth ever ever separating us) I should never never be the same again. Something would go out of me for ever – everything mortal and immortal that one human being can give another I have given you – All the good and bad and little and big – You are everything in life to me – I really mean it. The sort of affection one gives parents children brothers sisters friends the comrade element of life you have *all* of that, I rejoice utterly in you as a perfect gay heart free companion. No Mum has ever passionately loved a baby boy or a splendid grown up son as I do you. No brother or sister have ever felt the complete accord I feel to you. No two men, no 2 women, no child ever looked up to a parent as I do to you. And then above and beyond all that I can't write at all of what I feel about you as my husband and lover. No words in the world could ever tell you that, only if you could look with my eyes and heart how would you know. Don't think me stupid but I must tell you.

I wish I knew what you were doing tonight just so as to picture and visualise you. I wonder apropos of what I said awhile back of your meaning every thing and person in the world to me whether I am

too wrapped up in you (can one be) expect too much from you, ask for *nothing* from *any one else*, only *all* the time things from you. Poor you. And then when as is only human you sometimes can't give, then I think you are bored with me – I think you ought not to ask anything from anyone in the world but me – I am afraid I am narrow and stupid but the excuse is that I am dotty potty about you almost (I believe this to be very nearly true) to insanity. I must steady myself. I think this week has done a great deal towards steadying and will you help when I get back to you – help by being not too moody, not too fierce, not too getting into rages and finding fault. I really am looking forward with the utmost confidence to a time of great peace and enjoyment of each other and no worries, anyway in our real inner lives.

My heart I love you so, trust you so, respect you so, and yet again love and adore you so. Goodnight.

Saturday night. 8 Smith Square.

My own most beloved darling,

Just a very last line in hopes you may just get it before you go – I have missed you so terribly – I do adore you more every day I live and I realise so terribly through this parting how tragically dependent I am on you – My own treasure darling I long to see your wonderful face again (kisses its pic every night) Only 4 more days and I shall on Wednesday be waiting on the station for my adored wife.

X.

Sunday evening. Lou Mas.

My sweet one, I believe I have it in me to find fault with you this evening – you are a worse correspondent than ever I had anticipated or else the posts have been bad. Another 2 days without letters at all. I got one Tuesday, none on Wed, none Thurs, then 3 on Friday almost *too* good, then none Sat, none Sun – I wonder how all mine to you have arrived, have you received them every day? I hope so, you ought to have. I have had so little to do, so many long hours alone, I have had much more time at my disposal than you. I find myself awfully bad about going out without you, I really have been the week I have been alone alone here an absolute hermit, all my meals alone, I have refused practically every invitation to go out and am terrified and shy and woefully haughty and *un*selfconfident. Went to lunch at Maryland today, arrived 20 minutes late because of our damn fool clocks, found Princess Louise, Lady Londesburgh, Jack Wilson,

Muriel Ward, husband, Harry Stoner etc: got on pretty well with Muriel found her easy and charming went up with them to Rosemary this afternoon the same party as the other night with Eric Mackenzie and Lady Maidstone extra.

I am very ill at ease with those sort of people they talked of nothing but bridge and smoking how could I join in – I tried desperately hard to be friendly and gay – I think I was all right ...

I wonder what it will feel like seeing you, having you, touching you again. Your actually going away was so *far* worse than I had anticipated I hope perhaps actually meeting may be better: though it would be hard, my anticipation is *so* running riot ...

My last goodnight to you in writing, I wonder if you'll get this before me – you ought to – I put my arms around you tight tight and kiss your dear eyes and mouth I love and worship you and send everything I can across the land and water, between every line is my love for you, filling every corner of the envelope even as it fills every corner of my life – I keep back just a tiny bit extra for Wed – no – I needn't as I shall have such a lot over and to spare all Monday Tues and till Wed evening I shall be bursting.

My precious heart
Your fellow

Our baby has been so sweet and an unbelievable joy and comfort.

CHAPTER 5

Politics and Society

I was born on June 25th 1923; almost immediately I became very ill. My mother did not feed me: it was not the custom at the time for upper class mothers to feed their children: my nanny however told me later my mother wanted to, but could not. A wet-nurse was hired – a Mrs Green – and while my mother and father went off in August for their summer holiday to Venice (it was also not the custom for such wives to become socially unavailable to their husbands who it was thought needed them more than babies) myself, my sister Vivien, Nanny, Stella the nurserymaid, Mrs Green and Mrs Green's own baby, all went off to a rented house at Birchington, in Kent.

Nanny wrote every other day to my mother at the Excelsior Hotel on the Lido at Venice and at the Palazzo Priuli in the town. She reported on how I was getting on with Mrs Green. I was vomiting, I could not swallow, I cried most of the time, and my motions (as Nanny called them) had become, aptly, green. Doctors were called and recommended that I be 'put on' first bismuth, then castor-oil and barley water, then something called peptonised milk: but all this was only in preparation for being 'put back' to Mrs Green. Nanny became alarmed ('I am sure the 3 oz he lost last week was all from his face'); on her own initiative she took me up to London and got a specialist to see me in a sitting room at the Grosvenor Hotel. The specialist recommended that I should be fed with nothing but 'sherry whey'. Nanny wrote 'He has had nearly a whole bottle of sherry this week, little tippler, he loves it'. Thus, it seems, my life was saved. Later it was found that Mrs Green (this story is not in the letters to my mother: it was told to me later by Nanny) had all the time had a crate of gin bottles under the bed. Surprisingly or otherwise, I am not yet (1982) an alcoholic.

Nanny continued to rescue the lives of myself, my sister and my

brother for many years. She was one of sixteen children of a working class family (her father was a gardener) who, having helped her mother to bring up her younger brothers and sisters, had gone out to work aged fifteen as a nurserymaid to America; then had joined my mother and her two sisters in India after Baba had been born. As the sisters grew up and Nanny had had to leave, she had promised Cimmie that she would come back to her when she, Cimmie, had children; she had done so when Vivien was born. Nanny Hyslop represented everything steadfast, trustworthy, down-to-earth, in our childhood. The world of our parents seemed to do with ambitions and passions like that of gods on Mount Olympus.

My mother seems to have tried, in a way beyond what was usual at the time and for her class, to be a 'good' mother: she was certainly seen as such: but it would have been almost impossible for her to take much of her allegiance away from Tom. Tom himself tried (for the sake of 'Ganzheit'?) to be a good father: but it was his theory that the upbringing of children should be left to 'professionals': this was the same sort of theory that had led him to believe that the maintenance of aeroplanes should be left to professionals when he had crashed in 1915. The conventions of the time were that upper-class children should visit their mother in her bedroom after breakfast, and that they should go down to be on show in the drawing room after tea; but for the rest of the time their place was in the nursery, which was in relation to their parents' world as real life is to a stage.

Cimmie's and Tom's political life was in transition at this time: they were moving from being members if only peripherally of the conservative establishment to something more adventurous and left-wing. This was reflected in their choice of godparents for my christening in the summer of 1923. One was Nancy Astor, the Conservative MP for whom Tom and Cimmie had campaigned in 1919; others were Violet Bonham Carter and Archibald Sinclair, both prominent Liberals. A certain mystery however seems to have hung over my other godfather, or godfathers. Prince George, the youngest son of King George and Queen Mary, had been approached and had accepted; he had become a friend of Cimmie's in the south of France earlier in the year. But now he was a friend of her younger sister Baba and there had been stories about the possibility of their marriage. Prince George wrote to Cimmie from Buckingham Palace 'I hope you don't mind my asking you not to say anything about my being Godfather but there has been such trouble already about Baba that they would be furious if there was anything else seen in the papers'. So it seems that I had an additional

godfather – Mr B. A. Campbell, General Secretary of the 'Paddy's Goose Boys' Club' in Shadwell, East London. Mr Campbell wrote to Cimmie 'You know I would love to have the honour and privilege of being godfather to your boy ... there is only one difficulty ... I only have one suit – an ordinary working suit – and if I can attend in that I will'. I myself never knew that Mr Campbell was my godfather until I came across this letter in 1981.

Tom's political disillusionment with his establishment friends came to a head during the summer holiday of 1923 when he and Cimmie were in Venice, I was with Mrs Green at Birchington, and Mussolini invaded Corfu. Tom hoped that sanctions against Italy would be ordered by the League of Nations: he left Venice for Geneva, where Robert Cecil was the British representative. Robert Cecil too favoured sanctions: he went to consult Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister (a Conservative government had taken over from Lloyd George's coalition government in 1922): Baldwin was taking the waters at Aix-les-Bains. Baldwin told Robert Cecil that he should do whatever he thought fit: Robert Cecil had hoped for firm orders. He returned to Geneva dejected. Tom was repelled both by Baldwin's inability to give orders and by Robert Cecil's need of them. He wrote 'Will was not available, because in such men it is only aroused by intense emotion': they had remained passive when 'by an act of cold will fortified by the calm calculation they had every prospect of victory and their opponent had none'. (He later compared this attitude to the 'white-hot emotion' with which such men had started what he saw as a profoundly risky war in 1939).

Tom advocated, in theory, the use of calm calculation as a prelude to decisive action: but what he himself often used calculation for, as do nearly all politicians, was skilful prevarication. In the general election of 1922 he had stood again for Harrow, but now as an Independent. The local Conservative Association had tried to pin him down about his opinions before they decided to back him. However the President of the Association reported:

> We found it extraordinarily difficult to bring Mr Mosley to the point. He could never be persuaded to give a direct answer to a direct question, and developed an unrivalled skill in qualifying any written or spoken statement he could be induced to make with some loophole by which, if convenient, he could escape from the obvious meaning of his words. This feature in his conduct became so marked both in private discussions and meetings of the Executive that we were gradually forced to the suspicion that Mr Mosley was merely tem-

> porising with us and that he intended at his own time and in his own way to throw over his Party in his constituency as he had already thrown it over in the House of Commons.

But the reason for his prevarication, Tom stated, was:

> I cannot enter Parliament unless I am free to take any action of opposition or association, irrespective of labels, that is compatible with my principles and is conducive to their success. My first consideration must always be the triumph of the causes for which I stand; and in the present condition of politics, or in any situation that is likely to arise in the near future, such freedom of action is necessary to that end.

One of the charges that could be laid against Tom perhaps throughout his political career was that he claimed for himself the rights of manipulation and prevarication that were part of the normal game of politics, while he seemed genuinely outraged by the use of such methods by others. This was a self-deception that created an impression of honesty; though in the end, as with all self-deceptions, it worked to his disadvantage.

The Harrow Conservative Association decided not to back him, and to put up an official candidate against him. Tom, as an Independent, appealed to the electorate:

> The war destroyed the old party issues and with them the old parties. The party system must, of course, return in the very near future, but it will be a new Party system ... My intention not to wear a label which at present, may be confused with past controversies, does not mean that I adopt the empty independence of men who can agree with no one. I am not a freelance incapable of such cooperation, and am prepared to work immediately with men who hold similar opinions in the face of the great new issues of our day.

At the election Tom had got in with a majority somewhat reduced but still over 7,000. This was a personal triumph. His oratory, his dashing style, his ability to arouse devotion irrespective of party loyalties – all this had maddened his opponent who had, as before, been driven to personal abuse; accusing Tom of treachery about Ireland and about India. Tom, it was claimed, had incited Indian students to revolt against British rule. Tom threatened a libel action; his opponent unreservedly withdrew. Tom wrote 'I had very speedily in self-defence to

develop a certain ferocity in debating methods ... or I would not have survived'.

This independence meant that he was increasingly isolating himself politically: but he must have known he was unlikely to be effective in British politics if he remained without allegiance. Both the Liberal and Labour parties were in need of young and energetic men: they were out to catch him: it had been significant that neither had put up a candidate against him in 1922. It seemed natural at first that he might turn to the Liberals. As early as 1920 Margot Asquith, the wife of the Liberal ex-Prime Minister, had written to Cimmie about how highly her husband regarded Tom: now Violet Bonham Carter, Asquith's daughter, wrote:

> Father came into my bedroom last night on his return from the House to tell me that your Tom (may I call him Tom?) had made the most brilliant speech he had almost ever heard: I have never seen him more completely swept away.

Tom and Cimmie went to stay with the Asquiths at their country house The Wharf: the Liberals began to talk of them as 'one of us'. But Tom was probably doing some of the 'calm calculation' that he advocated for men of action. At the 1922 election the Labour Party had been the chief gainers with an increase in the number of MP's from 63 to 142 (the Liberals had 117). When Baldwin called another general election at the end of 1923, on the issue of protectionism versus free trade, Labour became the strongest Party in the House of Commons with 191 seats and the Liberals, although their fortunes had improved at the expense of the Conservatives, were even further behind Labour with 159. A Labour Government was formed. It seemed obvious that if Tom was going to put an end to his isolation by joining a party – and with an eye to being part of a government in the near future – it made sense if one's feelings were more for Labour than for Liberals.

Another impetus to join a party was the fact that in the 1923 election his majority at Harrow was down to 4,600: his old conservative supporters were leaving him. It had been, as, usual, a vituperative campaign. His old friend F. E. Smith, now Lord Birkenhead, had come down to speak for Tom's official conservative opponent and had referred to Tom as 'the perfumed popinjay of scented boudoirs'. Tom took umbrage. He did not mind, he said, the reference to boudoirs; but he seemed to think that 'popinjay' was a slur on his performance there.

There is little record of Cimmie in politics during Tom's years at

Harrow. At the time of her wedding she had received a letter from Tom's mother handing over to her the position of 'political leading lady': she had made a speech of thanks to the constituency for their wedding present after which a local newspaper reported that 'her victory was greater than her husband's at the polls 18 months ago': she had helped, together with his mother, in Tom's electioneering campaigns. But she never seemed to have had much time for the Harrow style of politics. Most of the first four years of her marriage was spent in settling into the house in London, giving birth to two of her children, and making the complicated arrangements for holidays, servants, dinner parties, and so on, for Tom's cosmopolitan entertainment. There is no evidence that she ever indulged in the game of upper class married women being available for love affairs: she was always available to use her social charms for the advancement of Tom. But as Tom moved closer to Labour her involvement became more political. As early as May 1923 she was entertaining the Labour leader, Ramsay MacDonald, to lunch: she struck up some sort of flirtatious relationship with him. Later that summer she invited him to join her and Tom on holiday. He replied:

> Thank you very much for your letter inviting me to stay with you in Venice when I am passing through. Sidney Arnold is with me and the two of us would I am sure be too big a handful for you. But in any event let us have a feast together.
> I hope the little person who I saw had come to smile on you both gives you much happiness ...

When the first Labour government was formed in January 1924 with Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister Tom made a strong speech in Parliament abusing the Tory record ('drift buoyed up by drivel') and wishing the Labour well ('tonight the army of progress has struck its tents and is on the move.') It now seemed only a matter of time before Tom joined the Labour Party. His Liberal friends were annoyed. On January 19th Margot Asquith wrote:

> Dear Tom, You and Cimmie are very dear to me. I am old and you are young. I have watched politics closely since I was 15, having 3 great friends – Gladstone, Morley, and A. Balfour – 3 very different men. Clear conviction and patience, courage and ambition and not too much self-love with perfect self-control go to make leaders of men. I have watched men of great ability – 1. Rosebery 2. Balfour,

> Winston and Birkenhead, all ruin themselves in turn. I am not persuading you to be a Liberal and you can change from Tory to Liberal or vice versa: I am writing to warn you to take *long* views. Your future might be a great one in the Liberal Party; possibly, Cim says, in the Labour Party. But I myself see little difference between the extremes of left and right; I have never seen anything more selfish, jealous and petty – apart from gross and pathetic ignorance – than Labour; and every word you say of Tory is true. Class consciousness devours both. I have not seen you lately but before joining Thomas – a liar: Ramsay – a coward: I should think twice.

Tom made a joke about this letter saying that Margot Asquith had abused his best friends. But in fact it was his old acquaintances who were, as usual, abusing him. The main criticism of the prospect that he might join Labour was that he would be pandering cynically to a desire for power: that he saw his own future brighter in the Labour Party in that he wanted to be a 'big fish in a little pond'. But these accusations made little sense. Tom could have done as well as he wished in the Conservative Party if he had not been outraged about matters of principle; there was little enough talent among young Conservatives for him to have felt much danger of being outshone. And although there might be an initial glamour about himself as an aristocrat joining Labour he was clever enough to know that there would also be reactions and repercussions. He felt drawn to Labour because of what he felt as the sluggishness and corruption of the establishment parties: and in so far as it was true that he could do something about this only as a member of a group, then the Labour Party was the one most likely to act in the way that he desired.

There is some truth, however, in the charge that he saw politics largely in terms of what might be a platform for himself: he was always, and he thought justifiably, something of a one man party band. Even at this time (he was twenty seven) he was imagining that it was the democratic tradition of a government being harried by an opposition that prevented things being done: this was the 'drift buoyed up by drivel'. If words were to be turned into action, this would be through unencumbered power being given, albeit democratically, to a single group led by a single responsible man. He seldom prevaricated about this. In every attitude he had taken (and was to take) in politics he stood on some principle: and he said to other people in effect that they could either follow him or not as they chose. This was something unusual in

English politics – where the tradition has been to manipulate and manoeuvre possibilities. The one charge it was difficult to bring against Tom was that he manipulated what he saw as his principles for the sake of success: if he had, he might have succeeded.

At the time when he was attracted to Labour and Labour was wooing him his mother wrote to him:

> I must pen a line to try and tell you how enormously I admire your amazing courage and self-sacrifice of most things that appeal to men of your age and up-bringing; and how I pray with all my heart that your dreams for the benefit of struggling humanity may come true, and that I may live to see your present attitude justified by results and the world appreciate that far from being a pushing self-seeking politician you were in fact willing to be a martyr for your Religion – for it seems to me that is what your Politics are.
>
> And oh darling how I wish with all my heart and soul I could honourably back you up ... I do honestly believe that if the 'Labour Party' meant what you and some of those in the party are striving to make it every one of us would back you. But to my mind the tragedy of it all is that the vast mass of your often very ignorant supporters do not mean what you mean by Socialism ... It is an old story – as old as the Bible. When the Jews found following Christ meant the cross and not an earthly sovereignty and defeat of the Romans they turned on him and crucified their Lord ...

Tom's mother, a pious Christian, seems to have been the first person to see – and almost to welcome – that there might be something self-immolating in Tom's heroic stands. In the meantime there was the formal business of his application to join the Labour Party. To this, on March 27th 1924, Ramsay MacDonald replied –

> My dear Mosley,
>
> Although I have welcomed you into the Party by word of mouth, I would like to tell you in writing how pleased I am that you have seen your way to join us and to express the hope that you will find comfort in our ranks and a wide field in which you can show your usefulness.
>
> I am very sorry to observe in some newspapers that you are being subjected to the kind of personal attack with which we are all very familiar. I know it will not disturb you in the least, and I assure you

it will only make your welcome all the more hearty so far as we are concerned.

With kind regards
I am yours very sincerely,
J. Ramsay MacDonald

CHAPTER 6

Rebels

In the spring of 1924 a young German newspaperman, Egon Wertheimer, attended a meeting of the Labour Party in the Empire Hall in south-east London. He wrote:

> Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd and a young man with the face of the ruling class of Great Britain but with the gait of a Douglas Fairbanks thrust himself forward through the throng to the platform followed by a lady in heavy, costly furs. There stood Oswald Mosley, whose later ascent was to be one of the strangest phenomena of the working class movement of the world ...
>
> The new man spoke ... unforgettable was the impression, the visual and oral impression, which the style of the speech made on me. It was a hymn, an emotional appeal directed not to the intellect, but to the Socialist idea, which obviously was still a subject of wonder to the orator, a youthful experience. No speaker at a working class meeting in Germany would have dared to have worked so unrestrainedly on the feelings without running the risk of losing for ever his standing in the party movement ...
>
> But then came something unexpected; something that, by its spontaneity, shook me; although it was a trifling thing and seemed a matter of course to all those around me. From the audience there came calls; they grew more urgent; and suddenly the elegant lady in furs got up from her seat and said a few sympathetic words ... She said that she had never before attended a workers' meeting, and how deeply the warmth of this reception touched her. She said this simply and almost shyly, but yet like one who is accustomed to be acclaimed and, without stagefright, to open a bazaar or a meeting for charitable purposes. 'Lady Cynthia Mosley' whispered in my ear one of the

> armleted stewards who stood near me, excited; and later as though thinking he had not sufficiently impressed me, he added 'Lord Curzon's daughter'. His whole face beamed proudly. All around the audience was still in uproar; as at a boxing match, or a fair.

Another commentator, John Scanlon, viewed this sort of scene with some despair, and said that whatever Tom's entry into the Labour Party had done for him, it was a disaster for the Party.

> Stories of his fabulous wealth had spread themselves all over the country, and coupled with that was the fact that his wife was the daughter of Lord Curzon. The press lost no point in this human story, and those of us who had visions of a dignified working class steadily gaining confidence in itself as the future owners of Britain had our first shock of disillusionment. No sooner had Mr Mosley come into the Party than there began the heartbreaking spectacle of Local Labour Parties stumbling over themselves to secure him as their candidate. At that time there was not a particle of evidence to show that he understood one of the problems in their lives... It was truly an amazing and saddening spectacle to see these working men, inheritors of a party formed by Keir Hardie in the belief that a dignified Democracy could, and should, run its own party, literally prostrate in their worship of the Golden Calf.

These two commentators were Marxists: Marxists are often amazed and disappointed at the ways of the working class. The British Labour Movement had been little influenced by international Marxism: its loyalties had been given to trade unions; or beyond them to the nation. Also in Britain, Tom used to say, there had always been an instinctive and emotional sympathy between the aristocracy and the working class who (in Lord Randolph Churchill's phrase) were 'united in the indissoluble bonds of a common immorality'. Together they showed disrespect for the puritanism both of left-wing intellectuals and of the bourgeoisie.

But then, in turn, it was natural that Labour intellectuals should distrust Tom after having been tempted to be charmed by him. Beatrice Webb wrote in her diary:

> We have made the acquaintance of the most brilliant man in the House of Commons – Oswald Mosley. 'Here is the perfect politician who is also the perfect gentleman' I said to myself as he entered the

> room . . . So much perfection argues rottenness somewhere . . . Is there some weak spot which will be revealed in a time of stress – exactly at the very time when you need support – by letting you or your cause down or sweeping it out of the way?

This was the feeling also of such Labour Party stalwarts as Hugh Dalton and Herbert Morrison, who had worked their way up diligently through the ranks of the Party and resented Tom's sudden jump half way to the top. Almost immediately Tom had more than seventy invitations from constituencies to stand as their candidate for Parliament.

Tom's power was in his use of words: as a public speaker he could go over the heads of the Labour hierarchy and appeal directly to working class audiences. As soon as he had joined the party he was taken on a speaking tour of the midlands and north: the editor of a Birmingham newspaper wrote – 'His power over his audience was amazing; his eloquence made even hardened pressmen gasp'. He had learned to speak without notes (a trick he had learned, he wrote, by getting someone to read to him a leading article from *The Times* and then speaking in reply to it 'taking each point *seriatim* in the order read'). He had an amazing memory for figures. He liked to be challenged by hecklers, because he felt confident in his powers of repartee. But above all what held his audiences and almost physically lifted them were those mysterious rhythms and cadences which a mob orator uses and which, combined with primitively emotive words, play upon people's minds like music.

This power that Tom had with words did not always, in the long run, work to his advantage. There were times when his audience was being lifted but he himself was being lulled into thinking the reaction more substantial than it was. After the enthusiasm had worn off like the effects of a drug an audience was apt to find itself feeling rather empty. (In the same way Tom's girlfriends, one of them once said, would feel somewhat ashamed after having been seduced.)

Tom never understood the limitations of the power of words. He was apt to think that once a case had been reasonably and passionately stated the cause had been won: that if a difficult question had been parried or skilfully avoided, it had somehow disappeared. He did not see that it was often his very skill in the manipulation of words that made people suspect he might not be quite serious: for what is serious about a person who does such clever tricks with the difference between words and things? People reacted sometimes as the Conservative Association had reacted to him at Harrow: they admired his ability to spellbind, to bluff,

to hit, to parry: but what had this got to do with what actually was required?

While he was on his speaking tour he wrote to Cimmie from the Durham and North Yorkshire Public House Trust Co:

> His own darling Moo-Moo,
> Does so miss her, but lucky she did not come as life is like the Great War – billets – no sheets etc – everyone very kind but a tiresome tour, lots of little 500 meetings, not my form at all, same kind friends also always accompanying, so have to improvise a different speech each time. Longing to return to wiz land and hopes to do so 10 p.m. tomorrow Monday (great excitement). All love in world from adoring
> her fellow.

Cimmie herself had joined Tom as a member of the Labour Party. The jibes which hitherto had been directed at Tom for his anti-Tory activities now also began to be directed at her. There were comments in the newspapers about her money: if she and Tom were socialists why did they not give the property away; why did they live in a house with sixteen rooms; why did Cimmie appear on Labour platforms in jewels and 'costly furs'? To this she and Tom replied that it would not help others in any serious way if they gave away their money and they could be of more use to socialism by themselves using it to finance organisation and propaganda. As for Cimmie's 'jewels' – they had been, in the instance quoted, she explained, bits of glass in a dress bought for a few shillings in India. There was then a peculiar wrangle with the Press on the subject of family titles. Tom was reported as having said he would not use the 'Sir' of his baronetcy when his father died; Cimmie as having remarked, rather irrelevantly, that she wanted to drop the 'Lady' Cynthia and be known as plain Mrs Mosley but that unfortunately there was no legal way of doing this. Tom summed up: 'In any case inside the Labour movement my wife is always known as Comrade Mosley and what she is called outside does not really matter.' But the Labour Party rank and file apparently did not want to let the matter rest: about a meeting in London the *Daily Mail* reported:

> a series of quarrels were in progress among the audience about whether Mr Mosley is a duke, a knight, or a commoner. The Chairman attempted a compromise by describing him as 'Comrade Mosley' but this found disfavour with a row of very young women

> in front. Mr Mosley, caressing his miniature moustache with one hand and gaily slapping his razor-like trouser-leg with the other, beamed delightedly at the girls. One of them put his titular dignity beyond all doubt by exclaiming – Oh! Valentino!

Tom had gone on his tour of the midlands and north partly in order to choose a new constituency: he had decided that it would make no sense to stand for Labour at Harrow. The constituency he settled on was Ladywood, in central Birmingham: the sitting member was the conservative Neville Chamberlain. The Chamberlain family enjoyed almost feudal political power in Birmingham: it would be an extraordinary feat if Tom could even get near to dislodging him. Tom had been offered a number of relatively safe seats, but he seemed to sense that the initial euphoria in the Labour Party might, if he took too easy advantage of it, turn against him; and thus it would be most sensible for him to become involved in a serious fight.

The Labour Government of 1924 lasted less than a year. During the run up to the general election in November it appeared that there was such support for Tom in Ladywood that he might even win: then there was the Zinoviev letter – a document published just before the election purporting to come from the Communist International and encouraging British Communists to infiltrate the Labour Party but in fact a Tory forgery – and this had the effect of a number of hopeful Labour candidates just losing. At Ladywood it appeared at the first count that Tom had lost by seven; at the second count he had won by two; then at the third he lost by seventy seven. It was said that a Tory official had been seen 'disappearing towards the lavatory with a pile of votes'; but Tom discounted this, knowing that such stories were apt to crop up in close-run elections.

He did not seem to mind, in fact, the prospect of being out of Paliament for a while. This would give him time, he said, to sort out and to formulate his ideas: and he could probably choose when he liked a by-election by which he might be returned to Parliament.

Tom did in fact use the next two years to take stock of his position and to prepare for the future. He was twenty eight: he had had an extraordinarily crowded and successful career: but he had become known primarily as a critic with a cutting tongue and without much steadfastness or commitment to policy. It was essential, if he was to continue to claim to act on principle rather than on expediency or conventional party loyalties, that he should have a policy which would give substance to his principles.

During 1925 he and Cimmie went on a trip to India. The long journey by boat gave Tom an opportunity to read. He took out with him versions of the Vedas and the Upanishads ('every aspect of Indian religion had to be studied'); but the book that at this time made the most profound impression on him was one he picked up by chance in a bookshop in Port Said – Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite*. In the book Shaw takes the story of Wagner's *Ring* and interprets it as a parable about the collapse of capitalism and the emergence of a classless type of man to lead the proletariat: but Shaw cuts his own parable off before the last act of *Siegfried* and claims that from then on Wagner loses his grip on his serious theme and resorts to the histrionics of grand opera. But the point of the final dramas of the *Ring* is to illustrate how even the highest human intentions can be wrecked by human frailty; that the hopes of the most glorious leaders fail if frailty is not recognised. Tom, at this time, seemed to accept Shaw's truncated view of the allegory: drama might properly end with the hero in control. During the second half of his life, however, Tom wrote an essay which showed that he agreed more with Wagner than with Shaw.

One of the highlights of Tom's trip to India was a meeting with Gandhi: the latter was acting as chairman of a stormy meeting between Moslems and Hindus: Tom wrote – 'Throughout the uproar Gandhi sat on his chair on a dais, dissolved in helpless laughter, overwhelmed by the comical absurdity of human nature.' Tom seems to have loved India ('land of ineffable beauty and darkest sorrow') but at the time he did not seem to feel there was much in its paradoxes to be learned by him. He saw that India was being 'lost' by the 'bad manners' of Englishmen: but he did not easily think of politics in terms of what were and what were not good manners.

Another of the books he read on the journey to and from India was Keynes's *Tract on Monetary Reform*. Before this, his interest in politics had been mainly to do with matters of foreign or Irish policy – with the business of keeping the peace. He had made one important speech in 1921 on tariff reform; but for the most part he had felt no passionate concern with economic affairs. But when he joined the Labour Party he had seen, because he had been shown the manifestations of them, the most terrible and urgent problems of post-war England – poverty and unemployment. During his tour of the midlands he had been taken round the slums of Liverpool: he had written – 'The rehousing of the working classes ought in itself to find work for the whole of the unemployed for the next ten years.' This was typical, from now on, of the style of his thinking: if there were both unemployment and poverty,

then surely, logically, it was the job of the government to use the unemployed to get rid of the poverty: questions of how, and using what money, should be secondary to the decision. But perhaps he did not have the confidence to expand on such theories until he read Keynes.

Tom's understanding of Keynes happened at a time when few English politicians were paying attention to him and there had been little in Tom's background to have made it likely that he would be the one who did. There were two strands of orthodox economic thinking at the time: one was the liberal laissez-faire attitude which insisted that world trade and the functioning of markets should be left to themselves: government interference not only threatened individual liberties but actually made economic conditions worse: this was a sort of ecological argument like that about the dangers of trying to manipulate the balances of nature. This made sense when the British, as pioneers of the Industrial Revolution, had been at the centre of the manipulation of world manufacture and world trade: it made less sense now, when British exports of machinery had resulted in a situation in which other countries, with cheaper labour, were now manufacturing more cheaply goods which had previously been almost a British monopoly. The second attitude was that of protectionism, which sought to keep out of Britain the products of other countries' cheap labour by imposing tariffs on imports. The trouble with this was that it required a market which would continue to accept, without imposing retaliatory tariffs, British manufactured goods which Britain needed to sell in order to be able to buy raw materials. Such had been the imperialist policy of Joseph Chamberlain and the Conservatives. But imperialist politics presupposed that colonies should be kept as producers of raw materials and buyers rather than producers of manufactured goods, and thus in a state of subjection. This not only seemed immoral but, in the face of world opinion and the threat of war, impractical. Thus British manufacturing industries, with the lack of a clear policy, continued to lose ground. There was poverty and unemployment.

Keynes's *Tract*, published in 1923, suggested that the government, by deliberately controlling and manipulating the supply of money, might affect the economic life of the country in areas which previously had been thought to be at the mercy of almost inexorable forces of nature. Tom became interested both in this new attitude to money and in the idea of government manipulation. In India he had been struck by the self-defeating attitudes of what had been up to now a mixture of laissez-faire and imperialism: he had seen the cotton mills where Indians worked 'for five shillings a week often with modern machinery supplied by

Lancashire for its own suicide: this was no monument either to the humanity or to the intelligence of the British Raj'. By the time he came back from India he had begun to work out his own theory – stimulated by Keynes, but arising from his own powers of reasoning unconfused by the complexities of academic training; also from his faith, now, that there were few human problems that could not be solved by reasoning.

Tom's economic theories became known as the Birmingham Proposals – after his candidature at Ladywood, he had made a political base in Birmingham. The proposals were outlined in speeches that he made to the Independent Labour Party Conference and Summer School in April and August 1925: they were of such importance to Tom's thinking and indeed to his whole political career that they deserve a chapter to themselves. Tom himself used to say in old age that he would like best to be remembered for his economic thinking; and all his subsequent economic thought – with its original vision and practical weaknesses – was for the most part an elaboration and elucidation of the Birmingham Proposals of 1925. Tom presented his theory in a pamphlet called *Revolution by Reason*: and in the very title can be seen something of the optimism and idealism of Tom's ways of thinking.

In 1926 Tom and Cimmie travelled in America. They tried to keep out of conventional smart society, though they were fêted by William Randolph Hearst and had a fine time as usual in esoteric café society. There was a big lawsuit going on at the time between Cimmie's Leiter relations: an English branch of the family, the Suffolks (Mary Curzon's younger sister Daisy had married the Earl of Suffolk in 1904) were suing an American branch, headed by Joe Leiter, who had become senior trustee of the Leiter Estate and whom his sister Daisy Suffolk was accusing of misappropriating funds. The Curzon branch of the family were nominally backing the Suffolks but were trying to keep clear: in Chicago, where the capitalist lawyers were at work, Cimmie and Tom painstakingly ensured that they were entertained by the Socialist Party of America. The chairman of this however telegraphed to them in rather grandiose style: 'It is a rare privilege to join with the good Comrades in Chicago in giving a royal welcome to these notable and high-souled comrades and making them feel they are at home in the hearts of their comrades in the glorious international'.

Tom and Cimmie also went on a fishing trip with Franklin Roosevelt on his yacht: they became friends: Tom thought Roosevelt 'a compassionate man' but with 'scarcely an inkling of the turmoil of creative thinking then beginning in America'. This creative thinking seemed to Tom to give support to his proposals in *Revolution by Reason*: he noted

that 'the Ford factory produced the cheapest article and paid the highest wage in the world': was not this evidence that 'mass production for a large and assured home market is the industrial key'? He did not notice, or at least did not mention, that in Chicago for instance in 1926 there was enormous corruption.

When Tom got back to England he found that there was a by-election pending in Smethwick, a neighbouring constituency to Ladywood in Birmingham. Tom was asked almost automatically if he would stand. He agreed. All the old skeletons were dug by the Tory Press out of their class-obsessed cupboards: Tom and Cimmie were supposed to drive up to Birmingham in a Rolls Royce and change into an Austin Seven in the suburbs: Tom was accused of having bribed the previous member of Parliament to retire (he was ill and died three months later): there were cartoons of Tom as a jewish-looking money-lender bribing the poor with bags of gold. Even Tom's father, the reprobate and by now somewhat alcoholic Sir Oswald, was unearthed by the *Daily Express* and in an interview said that Tom had been 'born with a golden spoon in his mouth... lived on the fat of the land, and had never done a day's work in his life'. Tom replied that he had been 'removed from the care of my father when I was five years of age by a court of law and since that date my father knows nothing of my life'. At the election meetings there was some violence: Tom's conservative opponent was, ironically a coal miner: when he referred to Tom's aristocratic background he was shouted down by Tom's followers singing *The Red Flag*. When this was reported scathingly in the Tory press a group of 'socialist amazons' tried to manhandle reporters in a press box. One of Cimmie's old school friends wrote to her from Scarborough – 'It isn't true, is it, that *you* climbed up on a wall and helped to shout down your opponent... My dear, I simply dare not own up that I know you here!'

But an editor wrote – 'If I were an elector of Smethwick the vicious personal attacks that are being made on him [Tom]... would certainly lead me to vote socialist'. And after Tom had got in, by a largely increased Labour majority of 6,582, the *Birmingham Post*, his chief opponent among the local papers, admitted that it had been unwise with its abuse: 'left to himself he would have fouled his own nest'.

Tom announced to the crowd outside the Town Hall – 'You have met and beaten the Press of reaction... My wonderful friends of Smethwick, by your heroic battle against a whole world in arms I believe you have introduced a new era for British Democracy.'

The Smethwick Labour party asked him whether, now the election

was over, he and Cimmie would at last consent to appear in their Rolls Royce for the victory parade. Tom had to explain that the car really was part of a myth.

CHAPTER 7

The Birmingham Proposals

Tom's Birmingham Proposals, which he regarded as central to his political thinking, were an attempt to move beyond both laissez-faire economics which allowed British manufacturing industries to be undermined by the produce of cheap foreign labour, and imperialist-protectionist economics which depended for success on colonial exploitation and the risk of war. Tom called his pamphlet *Revolution by Reason*. 'Revolution' was necessary because of the urgency of the problem: 'time presses in the turmoil of war's aftermath... crisis after crisis sends capitalism staggering ever nearer to abysses of inconceivable catastrophe to suffering millions'. A solution by 'reason' was possible because men had not yet taken all peaceful steps available in the matter of control.

With laissez-faire economics there was by definition little government control. With imperialist-protectionist economics there was still the threat of foreign retaliation and the country's vulnerability to it. Tom's 1925 proposals claimed that the problem could be faced in the first place exclusively in terms of the home market – over which, it might reasonably be thought, a government might have control.

The problems at home were poverty and unemployment. A cure for these was available, it was suggested, once a connection was seen between the two. The reason why there was industrial unemployment was because there was no demand for manufactured goods: the reason why there was no demand for manufactured goods was because there was so much poverty that people could not afford them; the reason why there was poverty was because there was unemployment. There was no way out of this vicious but almost ridiculously simple circle so long as laissez-faire dogma ordained that any government interference would

only make things worse, and protectionism increased no one's ability to buy manufactured goods. What was required was that the government should make life-giving injections into this otherwise moribund circle – injections of money from State banks, so that the whole process should be reversed.

The injections of money were to take the form of credit being made available to the poorer sections of the community so that their new purchasing power would stimulate a demand for goods. This demand would in turn create employment in industries hitherto moribund, and this increased demand for labour would mean that in a short time the poorer sections of the community would be employed and earning their own keep. The whole scheme seemed rather magical: you just touched with a wand the viciously circular economic pumpkin as it were, and the national economy turned into a golden coach. Tom perhaps felt himself justified in having a certain contempt for people who seemed not to have thought of it before.

The reason why people had not talked much of this sort of thing before was of course a fear of inflation. If the government just pumped more money into the economy then it was likely that the effect would be simply that prices would rise and real purchasing power be lessened. To counteract this Tom proposed that the availability of credit should be commensurate with the production of goods: 'new and greater demand must of course be met by a new and greater supply of goods or all the evils of inflation and price rise will result. Here our socialist planning must enter in... the whole of Socialist strategy must be directed to preventing any attempt by Capitalism to avoid meeting the new demand with a greater supply of goods and to play for a rise in prices'.

To safeguard against this, it was essential in the first place that the money made available should get into the right hands: it should go, simply, to the poor and not to the rich. 'Money in the hands of the workers means demand upon the great staple industries in which men and machines are now idle'. In the hands of the rich 'it concentrates in sudden whim upon some unprepared industry or rare commodity: prices soar and an unhealthy boom begins': then the rich man's fancy changes, and there is collapse and unemployment. The traditional means of making credit more easily available was to lower the rate at which money could be borrowed from banks; but this 'encourages the least desirable kind of borrower... a rush of speculators follows in order to borrow cheap money from the banks to buy and hold up commodities in expectation of a rise in price... little of the new purchasing power percolates through to the working class'.

In order that credit should be made available to the workers, banks would have to be nationalised: also an Economic Council 'vested with statutory powers' of supervision and direction would have to be set up. This Economic Council would give directions about where credit should be made available to consumers and where it should not: moreover it would direct where and how credit should be made available to the producers, the industries. This was the second essential factor in the task of ensuring that the supply of money would not be greater than the supply of goods and cause inflation.

> The business of this Council will be to estimate the difference between the actual and the potential production of the country and to plan the stages by which that potential production can be evoked through the instrument of working class demand. The constant care of the Economic Council must be to ensure that demand does not outstrip supply and thus cause a rise in price. It is evident that the new money must be issued gradually and that industry must be given time to respond to the new demand. If the whole working class were suddenly given a £1 rise in wages one Saturday night, an all-round rise in prices would be inevitable... The Council would feel their way gradually to the maximum production. Sometimes they might enforce a wage rise of 3d or 6d a week. Sometimes they might cry a halt until supply had time to catch demand.

The way in which it was suggested that credit would best be extended both to the working class and to industry would be through a method whereby credit was given to certain industries on condition that they paid higher wages: thus money would be made available for both workers and producers at the same time. 'The Economic Council would fix from time to time wages which individual firms or amalgamations were to pay. The State Banks would then grant overdrafts for the payment of these wages until the Economic Council directed that the industry could shoulder its own wage bill by reason of its increased prosperity. No additional overdraft for wage purposes would then be granted.' In this way, increased production of goods would balance an increase in money and inflation would be avoided. All this would not affect the responsibility of the State for 'the proper maintenance of human existence' at a more basic level: suitable sums would continue to be paid to the unemployed through Labour Exchanges. But by the manipulation of credit for wages and the production of goods it was expected that the unemployed would quite rapidly be absorbed.

This method of controlling credit to industries for the payment of higher wages would also ensure:

1 Luxury trades need not receive the accommodation and could be closed down as and when desired. The operatives could then be maintained on unemployment pay while they were trained for absorption in useful industry.
2 The extra profits arising from the new demand created for consumers would be automatically absorbed by wages to whatever extent was decided. The Economic Council would arrange the gradual cessation of overdraft accommodation... Special taxation to deal with excess profits would thus be unnecessary.
3 Wages could be forced up in the highly skilled trades as their production increased simultaneously with the rises in the less-skilled and lower-paid occupations.
4 The firm grip of the Socialist State over the whole remaining field of Capitalist activity would be finally established. All industry would owe money to the State banks. The Constitutional Government would wield the vast powers now exercised by private bankers.

One of the chief aims of the operation, in fact was to take away power, and profit, from the hands of private financiers, and to give power to government and profit to workers and producers. Even if there was a small amount of inflation this would work to the detriment of financiers who obtained their money through fixed rates of interest, and it would be to the benefit of workers whose income was flexible. The whole scheme was one of 'summary socialism': if it worked it might indeed be some 'revolution by reason'.

The area of weakness in all this and one that Tom did not explore – as he had not yet explored the weaknesses of Shaw's interpretation of Wagner's *Ring* – was the fact that the scheme depended on human beings to make it workable. The Economic Council would have almost dictatorial powers: it is the case with human beings who have great powers unrestrained by traditional safeguards that they become corrupt or at best inefficient: even more, schemes that depend for their health on the near-miracle working of human beings usually carry with them the seeds of an almost deliberate self-destruction – as if the imposition of such responsibility sends people mad. Tom's proposals for the overriding powers of an Economic Council were forerunners of what later came to be his views about the necessity of a corporate Fascist state: it was his belief, possibly rational in theory, that only by such powers

could something decisive be done about situations of crisis. Tom in fact usually exaggerated the imminence of crises: but even in so far as he did not, he mistook something about human nature: he believed that human beings, when it had been clearly explained to them what were their vital needs and necessities, would not only altruistically but selfishly become honest and reasonable: they would sacrifice what might be short term advantages for long term ends. What he never saw was that in politics as in other forms of human activity human beings are for the most part interested in some sort of struggle, in manoeuvrings for power, in risks and even unpleasantnesses; and that these are often in direct opposition to what might reasonably be seen as long-term ends. Tom always saw himself as the perfectly reasonable man at the head of something like the proposed Economic Council: about other people, he was torn between imagining they were like how he imagined himself, and being dismissive of them when he found that they were not. If he had had talent for introspection or had allowed himself much practice at it, he might have seen that within the area of his own short-term drives and obsessions there were possibly seeds of self-destruction: he had a gambler's love of challenge and risk: the way he showed his contempt for his fellow politicians, for instance, was unlikely to work for his long-term ends. But his refusal to see that a consideration of what human beings are actually like is a vital part in any scheme about what human beings can actually do, is at the heart of the failures of this story.

Perhaps what allowed him to be so impervious to rumination about human nature or himself was the tendency of his critics to be just the same. It had been the tradition of economists to assume without argument that human beings were reasonable: this was a rule of the game: how else could they carry on as though their pronouncements were scientific and not at any moment likely to become nonsensical? It had been the tradition of left-wing politicians to make out that however much capitalists and conservatives had been and always would be corrupted by power, the revolutionary working class would not be: how else could they go on playing the game of protesting that as representatives of the working class they were incorruptibly driving for power? But whereas most of these people for all their lack of facility for introspection did seem to have some unspoken instinct, in England at least, about what human beings were actually like – they usually in fact withdrew before the probable consequences of their words had had much effect – Tom, by reason perhaps of his upbringing or nature, did not: he had the aloofness and perhaps the arrogance to believe that reasonable words, at least his own, might in fact mean what they

implied. This was one reason why he could so often make rings round his opponents by reasoning: he believed in it; while they, although they said they did, ultimately did not. Yet what they felt instinctively, and might have answered Tom by, was traditionally unspoken. They could not say to him in effect – Look, in your reasoning you leave out of account something about human nature: you leave out the fact that human beings with part of themselves like turmoil and something to grumble at and perhaps even failures to feel comfortable in: your economic perfect blue-print will not work simply because people will not want it to. They could not say this to him because this sort of language was not in the area prescribed for politicians. But then they could not argue with Tom because he could beat them by his untrammelled faith in reason. As a result they had to answer him by ostracising him and hardly answering him at all. This had the effect on Tom of making him think that his arguments were unanswerable: and so a new vicious circle was set up – that of Tom having contempt for his opponents for their silence, and they, stung by this, having no reply except a hatred that might indeed sometimes seem contemptible.

Tom might have learned something of the paradoxes of human nature, it might have been thought, from his relationship with Cimmie: but the convention was overwhelming that human beings might be one sort of thing in their private lives, but were something quite different and altogether more straightforward in politics. Every now and then Tom did seem to have an inkling of where the demands he was making on people by his proposals might lead were they ever put into effect – of how there might be failure unless a demand for something more than economic rationality was met. But then – what was a proper attitude to the risk of failure? Towards the end of even such a staid document as *Revolution by Reason* Tom dropped his tone of logic and entered into the rhetoric which was his other special talent, and which he used to try to persuade people when he felt the sands of reason running out; also, perhaps, to cover doubts that he must sometimes have felt yawning beneath himself. The style of the pamphlet suddenly changes: the substance of the rhetoric – and this is characteristic of the perorations of nearly all Tom's speeches – is permeated by a concern that has nothing to do with reason. The final tone of *Revolution by Reason* is a call for sacrifice and a bid for glory:

> We have reached a supreme crisis in the history of humanity. We stand, indeed, at the cross roads of destiny. Once again in the lash of great ordeal stings an historic race to action...

We must recapture the spirit of rapturous sacrifice. That immortal spirit was evoked by war between men of many common interests for purposes still obscure or frustrated. Why cannot a greater spirit be summoned forth by the war of all mankind against poverty and slavery? In our hands is the awakening trumpet of reality. Labour alone holds the magic of sacrifice. Dissolved are all other creeds of baser metal beneath ordeal by fire.

CHAPTER 8

Nursery World

My own consciousness as it emerged into this setting of strangely mixed reason and rapture was such that very little remains in it of these early years: I remember nothing of the country houses in which we stayed during the summers before I was four: and of the London house in Smith Square – where we lived on and off till I was eight – I remember a few scenes but with myself as a spectator as it were looking down on myself rather than as a participant. 8 Smith Square was a Queen Anne house or more accurately two houses knocked into one: my father used to say it was too small because the family were so much on top of each other: literally on top were the day nursery and night nursery on the third floor. In the night nursery the cots of my sister Vivien and myself were side by side and at night we would tell each other fantastic stories about children who had run away from their families and who lived in jungles or on rafts. When Nanny came to bed we would try to lie awake and watch her in half dark and through half closed eyes as she performed her amazing trick of undressing and putting on her nightdress without appearing at any moment to be wearing anything less than her full complement of clothing. In the day nursery there were cupboards full of toys all along one wall and life there seemed to be mainly a matter of being ready to do battle with my sister about minuscule matters of possession or prestige: however spoilt we were in our vast quantity of toys, there was still the desire for what the other had got and the possibility of a fight almost to death against dispossession. If my father had wanted to learn about human nature, he might have come up more often to the nursery.

From the square below – we were usually in London during winter – there would come from time to time strange noises that did seem to emanate from some jungle: the sound of the muffin man with his bell,

who carried his tray on his head; the cries of the any-old-iron man with his horse and cart who seemed to be calling for dead bodies. In the evenings there was the lamplighter with his long pole with a star on the end like the wand of a magician.

Each year there was a great festivity in the streets, which was boat-race day. Two men would appear very early on opposite corners of the square selling pale-blue and dark-blue rosettes. Huge crowds seemed to gather and drift past. The part of the river where the race took place was miles away, as indeed was anything to do with Oxford or Cambridge from most of the people who liked so arbitrarily and passionately to take sides. My sister and I, for no reason, were dedicated to Cambridge.

Most mornings our normal routine was for Nanny, Vivien and myself (at first in a pram) to go up Great Smith Street, past Parliament Square, across Birdcage Walk, and into St James's Park and then on to Hyde Park if Nanny felt energetic. In St James's Park we would feed the ducks or the pelicans: we were dressed very smartly for this: I remember buttons on boots and gaiters which were fastened with a sort of torture-instrument with a hook. One of the points of being immaculate in the parks was so that Nanny should not lose prestige with other nannies. Before she had come to us, Nanny had been for a time with a branch of the Rothschild family: we met, and had to keep up with, their children Rosemary and Eddie.

In the afternoons we would go down to our mother in the drawing room when she and my father were there. I remember nothing of these times. One of my sister's few memories (she was at Smith Square on and off till she was ten) is of our mother reading a story to us in the drawing room and then having to break off and rush away to vote in the House of Commons – a bell which had been installed in the house having gone off like a burglar alarm.

Sometimes my mother and father would come up to the night nursery to say goodnight before they went out to dinner. I have more memories of my father than my mother at these times, perhaps because he tried to be funny. Once he was going to dinner at Buckingham Palace and he was wearing full evening dress with medals: he showed us how he had pinned these medals on his behind. I remember thinking this enormously funny.

My sister Vivien is two and a half years older than I. When I was born, my mother reported that she was 'very gentle and attentive': Nanny reported that she exclaimed 'I'll bite him!' A year later Nanny wrote 'Vivien gets so excited when he walks and usually yells so loudly that

it frightens him and down he flops'. By 1925 she was recording – 'Nicko tries so hard to turn cartwheels and somersaults like the clowns but Vivien's one ambition is to hold him high above her head with one hand.' My stepmother Diana used to say that my sister and me were like the characters in the *Peanuts* cartoon, Charlie Brown and Lucy. We were very close, and loved each other, and fought, and doubtless did much to save each other's lives.

Nanny's letters to my mother were beautifully written in a clear unadorned style. They began 'Dearest Lady Cim' and ended 'Love from Odie' – which had been Cimmie's nickname for Nanny when she herself had been a child. Nanny was a brave, strongwilled woman without a trace of subservience: she seemed to look on most of the grown-up world as children. She accepted some conventions of the time about upbringing which would now be thought idiosyncratic: she would keep my sister and me for what seemed hours (and I think sometimes was) on our pots: we became adept at moving about the room on them like hermit crabs: our word for shit became – in the light of Nanny's injunctions – 'try-hard'. I have wondered what Freudians would make of this conjunction of shit with 'try-hard'. It was also about this time that I apparently got an obsession about taking keys out of doors and putting them down lavatories.

The time when I first seemed to become a participant rather than an onlooker in my childhood scene was when my mother and father bought a house near Denham, in Buckinghamshire, at the end of 1926: this was to be our home for the next fourteen years. Denham was only twenty miles from London but in those days it was in farming country: the house when we bought it was called Savoy Farm but my mother changed the name back to its more ancient form of Savehay Farm which was more in keeping with what she liked in the way of rustic simplicity. It was an Elizabethan farmhouse with six bedrooms and four reception rooms and a huge garden surrounded by water. My mother and father added a new wing at the back which contained four more guest rooms and servants rooms and a servants' hall. We moved into Savehay Farm in the spring of 1927 and the best of my childhood seems to have been nurtured by this house: I can remember details of every room in it: I still sometimes dream that I have bought it back, and am living there. I suppose it represents some Garden of Eden.

The river that ran past the end of one of the lawns of the garden was the Colne, a tributary of the Thames. There was a punt and a large canoe on the river and these could, with difficulty, be manoeuvred by my sister and me along a sidestream that ran right round the house – over a waterfall

and under bridges – a notable adventure. There were two weirs on the river, one at each end of our land (a hundred and twenty acres of farmland which went with the house): across one weir there was a bridge that led to an island thick with undergrowth like a jungle; across the other a bridge led to a thatched cottage, empty, like something in a fairy tale. During weekdays my father and mother were usually away: Nanny miraculously (or because she had been brought up in a home of sixteen children) did not take too much notice of what went on out of her sight: my sister and I were thus allowed much freedom. We would devise fantastic explorations and obstacle courses for ourselves: these were known as 'mucks': from branch to branch of trees, along the tops of walls, down over a water-wheel, up through high barn windows. (There were huge high barns unused because of the state of farming at the time in England). The bridge across the weir to the magic island jungle had partly collapsed, but it could still be crossed with legs on either side of the handrail: beyond the island there was a gigantic railway viaduct and beyond this, like an ogre, someone called Sir Robert Vansittart lived, who was an enemy of my father's being something to do with the Foreign Office. In the thatched cottage at the other end of the river my sister and I were sometimes allowed to camp; like Hansel and Gretel having been freed from their fairy tale.

What meant most to me about Savehay Farm I think was that for the first time I was able to be alone: before this, I had had to go under bedclothes and pretend to be in a one-man submarine before I felt alone. At Savehay Farm there was space – also room to hide. I remember the need for, and feeling of safety in, places to hide. There was a carved-out hollow in a thicket of bamboos: a passage through brambles and nettles: a disused tank in the rafters of a barn. In such places I could crouch, and listen, and hear the cries of huntsmen and steps of predators going past. The huntsmen and predators were only my good nanny and sister – those denizens of my unconscious. But my main memories of Savehay Farm have become to do with my own five senses: the hot buzzing of flies above nettles; the high ribs of the viaduct from which cold drips dropped down; the soddenness of weeds like bodies against the grating of a weir; the acrid smell of old plaster coming off the walls of the thatched cottage like dead skin.

Even when my parents were at Savehay Farm they often dallied in other parts of the garden. There was a rose-garden where my father sometimes walked: he would go to and fro, up and down; preparing his speeches, I suppose, by which he might order the world. In summer he would sometimes walk there naked: Nanny would warn us – Do not

go near! God walked thus, I suppose, in the Garden of Eden. So by seeing my father, or God, naked, might one know the difference between good and evil? I would creep along the passage on the first floor to where there was a window that looked over the rose-garden: this was risky because the window was in my father's bedroom: but if he was in the rose-garden he could not – or could he? – be in two places at once? However then, after all – how white and gentle and vulnerable he looked! So what was all the fuss about our not being allowed to see him in the rose-garden?

My father was, it was true, sometimes frightening. He had a way of suddenly switching from being the benign joker to someone with his chin up, roaring, as if he were being strangled. He would usually roar when he was not getting what he wanted – from servants; from my mother. Once when he was trying to work in his study and a small dog that belonged to my sister and myself was outside on the lawn barking, he leaned out of his window with his shotgun and fired off both barrels in the general direction of the dog. The dog stopped barking. My sister and Nanny were somewhat outraged at this: but I remember thinking – He would not have missed, would he, if he had been aiming at the dog? And how more efficiently do you stop a dog barking?

Nanny would tell stories of my father's terrible rudeness to servants: but she would add – 'He was only once rude to me.' Then she would wait, looking stern; and we children would understand that she had perhaps just looked thus at my father. She also told a story about Mabel, the parlourmaid, an equally formidable woman who was the friend of May, the gentle housemaid. Once my father had been rude to Mabel and then to her too he had never been rude again: she had answered him back with a very rude word. We knew it was no good pressing Nanny to tell us what was this word: it was something that grown-ups could tell stories about, but not utter.

Life for the children revolved, as usual, around Nanny, Mabel and May, and Andrée, my mother's lady's maid. Andrée had been with my mother before she had married: she stayed with the family, as Nanny did, after my mother's death for more than twenty years. She was a small determined Frenchwoman; indeed it is difficult to imagine my father being rude to her. I think my father must have got his reputation for rudeness from his relationships with manservants; which is probably why they do not seem to have been permanent figures in my childhood. There was for a time a Mr Cox, the butler, who hung about in a striped apron in the pantry and was the guardian of a huge knife-sharpening machine like a butter-churn, and another machine which curiously

could sharpen two pencils at once. I have no memories of any cook; they too must have come and gone: my mother had no reputation for caring about good cooking.

There were three staircases in the house – one at my father's and mother's end, one in the middle between the day and the night nursery, and one in the new wing between the guest rooms and the rooms of the servants. The only person who had a room regularly at my mother's and father's end of the house was my Aunty Baba; she was put in a rather grand room with a seventeenth century fresco on the wall of men in striped knickerbockers playing golf. Aunty Nina was always put at the other end of the house. To the children, in the middle, it often seemed as if we owned the house; it was we who remained, and the people looking after us, when everyone else had gone.

My mother's and father's end of the house was somewhat secret; taboo. You went along the passage, up three steps, were on the threshold of mysteries. My mother's bedroom was large and blue and airy and had a mass of small glass ornaments on shelves: they were of animals and birds and of a kind that would now probably be thought rather vulgar: my mother collected these when she went abroad, especially in Venice. My father's bedroom was smaller and brown and looked out on to the rose-garden: there was a scrubbed oak chest in it that was always locked. Of even deeper mystery were my mother's and father's bathrooms – there were two side by side across the passage. My mother's bathroom had the usual array of bottles and bowls and powders and creams; my father's had an enigmatic apparatus that hung on the back of the door and looked like a gutted octopus. I knew it was no use asking Nanny about this: the subject would be unmentionable like the word used by Mabel the parlourmaid. I worked out later that it was an apparatus for giving enemas.

When the children came down in the evenings at Savehay Farm we went not to the formal drawing room which was used only when guests were in the house, but to my mother's sitting room which was known as the Garden Room. This had low beams and a huge open fireplace and glass walking sticks hanging on the walls: there my mother would read to us. Once my father was persuaded to read poetry: he read Swinburne, and I fell asleep, and when I woke was covered with confusion. I wanted to ask – But might not such beautiful noises be supposed to send you to sleep?

There were certain moments of the year when it was the tradition that mothers and fathers should make special efforts with their children; the most striking of these was Christmas. After the usual opening of the

stockings at Savehay Farm and the going to church with Nanny (my mother and father never went to church) and after further presents and the christmas lunch, we had our special ritual. My father would say that he had to have a short sleep; we would exhort him not to, because after lunch was the time when Father Christmas arrived and my father might miss him. My father would promise that he would only have a nap, and be there for Father Christmas. But then at about three o'clock we would hear Father Christmas's sleigh-bells outside – this was my mother and Mabel the parlourmaid tinkling away in the garden – and we wanted to wake up my father but it was held to be too late: we were rushed out of the house by Nanny: Father Christmas was said to be already arriving at the top of the chimney. Father Christmas was of course my father, who in his study having dressed up in Father Christmas clothes complete with realistic beard and mask was now climbing up the Garden Room chimney on a stepladder held by May the housemaid while we were hoping to see him coming down from the sky at the top. We were again too late! Father Christmas was already on his way down the chimney – we were rushed back into the house just in time to see him emerge into the Garden Room down the steps held by May. All this was expertly handled by my mother – or else we children were rather thick. But my father was a very good actor: he spoke in a slow exhausted voice: poor Father Christmas! with all the other children in the world to get round to! one should not ask too many questions. And of course he had to wear a mask, to protect his face from soot. Anyway there was not much time: after we had got our presents from his sack we were rushed out of the house to see if we could catch him coming out of the roof: we just missed him again! but couldn't we hear the sleigh bells? And then after a suitable time of chasing bells around the garden there was the business of running back to my father's study and accusing him of being, yet again, so greedy and lazy that he had to go to sleep after lunch and miss Father Christmas! After a time I think I came to believe that Father Christmas must come from Harrods. Neither my sister nor I saw through my father's act while he was doing it.

There was a further ritual on Christmas evening which my father once more dominated and by which he charmed his children as indeed he charmed women. Just as my mother, when he was being loving towards her, was his mutton, his moo-moo; so were his children, as his term of endearment, porkers. When we children were making too much noise in his presence he would intone, as if it were some mystic mantra – 'What is it that makes more noise than one porker stuck under a gate?' – and we would groan, because we had heard the answer so

many times before: and then he would give the answer himself – 'Two porkers stuck under a gate!' – and then he would laugh, with a strange clicking sound behind his teeth. On Christmas evenings, then, we would gather round the Christmas tree and we would all hold hands and my father would begin one of his mantra chants and this would go faster and faster as we went faster and faster round the tree until we all fell down and my father's chant would be just – Porker porker porker...

All this was rather magical for children: the gods descended, and played, and put on a tremendous performance. But still, when the excitement was over, what was the world from which the gods came down? It did in fact seem that much of ordinary grown-up life consisted of things like making remarks that did not require answers with a distant look in one's eye; uttering noises which had the effect of everyone's falling about roaring with laughter. My awareness of my mother's and father's friends at Savehay Farm belongs to a slightly later time in this story: but what I remember from an early age about the grown-up world – not the world of Nanny and Mabel and May who stayed around and got things done but the world of god-like figures who came and went – was the way in which people did in fact seem to be making noises that were more like a baying, a trumpeting, than the telling of anything: noises just to let other people know that they were there, perhaps; or to give warning; or possibly to attract new friends. These noises most often came from behind closed doors: grown-ups did not seem to want to perform their most esoteric rituals in front of children. But at Savehay Farm I would creep down from time to time and would listen outside the dining room door which was just at the bottom of the nursery stairs; this was when my mother and father were having what Nanny called a dinner. The uproar seemed to be talk: but what on earth were they talking *about*; and who was listening? It was like the cries of the any-old-iron man; the bell of the man selling muffins. It was the roar of some jungle: not the nice quiet jungle across the broken bridge over the river: it was as if there were a forest fire.

CHAPTER 9

The Legend

When Cimmie arrived back from America in 1926 she gave an interview to an American newspaper in which she explained about what had been thought from her youth to have been her 'bolshevik' views, and why she had become a socialist.

> If you are to understand my position, you must take into account all the facts in my upbringing. You will understand that either I had to give in absolutely to the past – to ignore all that was happening in this country and the rest of the world – or to resist upon every issue. I suppose my father and I were two very typical figures, and that the same drama has been enacted in many homes; only I do not know another man who was so splendidly, so utterly symbolic of the old world, the pre-war world, as was my father. I should like to think that I am as typical of the new world, the post-war world.

When George Curzon was dying in March 1925 and he was already not on speaking terms with Cimmie owing to the quarrel over her money, she and Tom had just returned from their trip round India. George Curzon was told a story about how Tom, when in India, had been present at an official dinner at which the King's health had been drunk and he, Tom, had refused to raise his glass. At first Curzon had not believed this story; then, because he learned that so many other people had heard it, he believed that it 'must be true'. All this was related back to Cimmie by a Curzon aunt. A few days later her father died.

The story of the wine-glass in India is typical not only of the sort of stories that were told about Tom but of his own and other people's reactions to them. It is inconceivable that the incident in the story could have been enacted by Tom deliberately: such a gesture would have

seemed to him just silly. But there were of course people who would want to imagine such a story; and Tom did little to persuade them it might not be true. The Curzon aunt who related the story to Cimmie finished her letter with – 'But why does Tom not take steps to deny these stories?' – and her question seems relevant to something that might be true.

Members of the aristocracy in those days had put upon them some of the fantasies that are now put on to pop-singers and film-stars: they were the stuff of newspaper gossip: people queued up in streets to see them. Cimmie had become a somewhat legendary figure at the time of her marriage: there were other upper class girls like this: but there was no one quite like Cimmie after she had become Labour.

In the Labour Party Cimmie and Tom took upon themselves a new form of adulation: it seemed part of the new legend perhaps that they should also suffer calumny. Cimmie's old friends took trouble to write to her about things they had overheard at dinner parties or on the tops of buses – 'It's enough to make 'er father get up out of 'is grave and smash 'er, vulgar little beast'. But if she and Tom started to worry about replying to such remarks, they might not be able to be able to maintain their energy and dignity as pioneers. People who become legendary must have something in them that wants to be like this: they must be impervious to, thrive on even, something of calumny: part of their strength, and their magic, is that they should seem to scorn herd-reactions. This can be a danger, as well as a strength. Tom sometimes went to great trouble legally to take action about libels against him: he almost never, in the light of what people said about him, showed much personal concern or modified his behaviour.

What Tom in his possibly for the most part unconscious heart seems to have wanted to do is to create a legend: this was more fundamental to him than that he should acquire power. Tom's biographer, Robert Skidelsky, has written about him that 'he was a complete professional in everything except the winning of power'. This was not just through mischance: it is an aristocratic attitude that says – Take me or leave me; I am as I am; either follow me or do not. It is this sort of attitude, also, that creates legends. And there is a way perhaps, in which the world in the long run is more affected by legends than by the manipulation of power: legends alter the way people think: this is on a higher level (if they are recorded) than that of power.

This would not have been worked out by Cimmie or Tom; there was something of it inevitably in their natures. They both came from backgrounds in which what mattered was more what you were than

what you did: aristocrats are supposed to have star quality – they are not simply actors. Both of them moreover seemed to have had some need of the aura that surrounds legends: as if only by this could they live up to the expectations they had found themselves landed with. They had to have constant reassurance – as if to placate demons.

With Tom there was his compulsion to be so frequently running after, and conquering, women: by this he got reassurance. He also used his seductive powers politically. A Labour colleague remembers being bowled over by Tom's flattery; then seeing Tom's eyes going past him to a waiting crowd.

Tom was good at telling Cimmie how wonderful she was: his letters contain almost endless protestations of love. He and Cimmie were known to quarrel: he had a terrible temper: he sometimes abused her publicly. Yet in all his letters to her there are hardly any words of reproach. It is as if, so far as letters were concerned, what was important to him was the use of gentle and reasoned words to retain her love: this was more important to him than efforts to face facts or get at the truth. He willed that he should retain her love by telling her so often how she had his own.

> My own most precious in the world, take care of her darling self and be strong and well for his return and fun with him. My own beloved – give a kiss to herself from her adoring Tom

With Cimmie, there had always been her recognition that she needed protestations of love: she had written of this as a schoolgirl: her mother had died when she was seven: her father, whom she admired, had fought her: she had needed to put herself at the centre of a group of adored and adoring friends. She would have accepted Tom's protestations simply because she required them.

> I do think it's been a good thing to be apart just for once, it may even be a good thing some time again, but please not for a very very long time. I so adore your letters, but I do so terribly miss you.

Then by joining the Labour Party, Cimmie opened herself to a whole new form of adulation: she became like some star actress suddenly offered a stage. She and Tom became the special favourites of Independent Labour Party politicians from Glasgow – James Maxton, Pat Dollan, John Wheatley. Tom was in great demand as an orator: he was loved for his rhetoric, his style. Pat Dollan wrote to Cimmie 'He has

leader qualities but he must be prepared to fight every inch. I like him when he is combatant because his combatant temper is what we need'. Glasgow politicians did not much like his pamphlet *Revolution by Reason*, because its reasonable socialist proposals would interfere with the freedom of Trade Union bargaining. But Cimmie began to be almost as much in demand as Tom: this was due not to her power with words, but simply to her ability to get herself loved. Pat Dollan wrote after an Independent Labour Party summer school – 'Yourself were one of the best of sports and everybody was pleased with you for your fun, fellowship, adventure and readiness to help. There is big work for you to do for the ILP and Socialism, and you can do it.'

The Independent Labour Party had been formed at the end of the nineteenth century to keep pure the creed of socialism at a time when many groups which called themselves Labour had not been sure about what alliances might be made. It still in the 1920's saw itself as the power-house of true socialism. It held its summer schools at Easton Lodge, a house belonging to Lady Warwick; where, in Tom's words 'very serious discussions' were rounded off in the evenings by 'charades, songs and dances'; also 'elements of the modern love-in'.

During 1925 Cimmie received many offers herself to stand for Parliament: she accepted one to become the Labour candidate for Stoke-on-Trent. This was not far, but perhaps, far enough, from Tom's constituency at Smethwick.

In London Cimmie had for some time been giving dinner-parties for Labour politicians – Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson, J. H. Thomas. James Maxton refused – 'I make a point of steering clear of all social functions.' Ramsay MacDonald continued his rather flowery flirtation with Cimmie – 'That disgruntled left-winger, Providence, has given me a nasty knock since we whispered "Easter" to each other and Tom made the scandalous proposal that I should take you to Corsica whilst he went to the ILP conference'. But then – 'I shall do what you like on Tuesday, dine in or out, go to a solemn or gay play (the latter preferred)'. Cimmie sent him a Christmas present for which he thanked her:

> One corner of my books shelves says to the other 'I was given by so-and-so' and looks most self-satisfied. Another answers 'Poof! do you know what Lady Cynthia gave *me*?' and puts its nose in the air.

Cimmie became something of a guardian angel to men who were now working with Tom and who might have been somewhat in awe of him

but who found Cimmie approachable. Foremost amongst these was Allan Young, the son of a railway worker in Glasgow, who came to Birmingham as Labour agent for Tom and later became his full-time political secretary in London. He wrote to Cimmie after a weekend in the country in 1926 –

> My thanks for a jolly weekend are delayed but sincere. I blush occasionally in fear that my crude behaviour may have irritated you but you will be kind and tolerant I am sure. After all I was 'born to the thong and the rod' and my body and mind are perhaps not yet attuned to sweeter things ...

Then later, when he had been with Tom and Cimmie abroad –

> You gave me beauty – pictures that will live for ever: space – in the sense that I was separated from the vortex of petty problems: privacy – in the sense that your fine culture (which is feeling) enables you to refrain from interference. I shall *dream* no more of France and Italy – I shall enjoy their beauty because I have absorbed it. The sun will stay with me now, and the added width and scope of my life and imagination will enable me to appreciate to the fullest the sweetness and generosity of your friendship.

Another of Tom's Birmingham colleagues that Cimmie took under her wing was John Strachey, five years younger than Tom, son of St Loe Strachey the editor of the *Spectator* and cousin of Lytton Strachey. He had joined the Labour Party before he had met Tom; then Tom helped him to get a constituency at Aston in Birmingham. John Strachey was unlike most of the people who worked in politics with Tom and Cimmie at this time in that he was upper or upper-middle class: he had been to Eton and Oxford. He hero-worshipped Tom. He was some sort of cavalier to Cimmie.

During the summer of 1925 he had spent much time with them and he was their guest in Venice in August. He and Tom there worked together on *Revolution by Reason*; later John Strachey wrote a book with the same title as Tom's pamphlet. Bob Boothby was also a guest of Tom's and Cimmie's in Venice that summer: he wrote years later – 'Every morning Tom Mosley and John Strachey discuss *Revolution by Reason* ... This was the period when Mosley saw himself as Byron rather than Mussolini ... He was certainly a powerful swimmer and used to disappear at intervals into the lagoon to commune with himself.' When

Strachey's book was finished he dedicated it to 'O.M. who may one day do the things of which we dream.'

John Strachey was by far the closest of Tom's Labour associates: he was an intellectual: he was the only friend who without much difficulty straddled, as Tom and Cimmie apparently so effortlessly did, the world of Birmingham socialist politics and international high-life in Venice. In 1925 he wrote a thank-you letter to Cimmie:

Dear, dear Cim

(I can't rise to Bob's beginning).

When one has stayed with someone off and on for about six months there is something rather comically inadequate about writing a Collins. Still I do want, somehow or other, to thank you for Venice. I quite literally can't tell you how much I enjoyed it. But almost more than that it has somehow *meant* a most tremendous lot to me. In some obscure way I feel quite different to before I went – altogether more capable of *coping* with life. Of course it is largely that one feels so marvellously well – with deep reserves of sun-energy in one.

And I do terribly want to tell you how grateful I am to you. I know very well my many imperfections and shortcomings as a guest, so I realise *how* nice of you it has been to bear with me so many months. But Venice was marvellous. I ran through, in that month, as many kinds of emotions and experiences as would last in England for a year. It somehow enlarged and liberated one. (Bob felt it – as he showed in that never sufficiently admired letter of his!) A little more and we shall, as he put it, strike the big notes again.

I am talking nonsense – I only mean that when we were all together we sometimes seemed able to strike points, moments, sparks, of enjoyment, of *fun*, which set the place on fire.

A more incoherent letter than usual. But please, please, take it as a symbol, a token, of something felt very deeply, even though not expressed at all. You were, you are, the centre round which we all radiated. Thank you.

John

Bob Boothby was a young conservative MP. He disagreed with Tom politically: but he believed, and continued to do so during a friendship which lasted for the whole of Tom's life, that there were more important things in life (and indeed in politics) than political agreement. The letter he wrote to Cimmie and which John Strachey mentions in his letter, was:

Darling Lady Cynthia,

(I humbly apologise – all other words are hopelessly inadequate).

How can I thank you as you ought to be thanked? An impossible task! I enjoyed – rapturously – every moment. No, there was one – at Faustino's entertainment – when I had drunk too little and too much – that which produces the 'grumpy' stage – and I was a credit neither to you nor to myself: but I withdrew once more to 'commune alone with the sea' ...

I can truthfully say that never in my life have I experienced such sustained enjoyment at so high a pitch. It was MARVELLOUS (one l or two? one I think). I thank you 1000 times ... If and when I do return I am going to ask you to let me spray myself with your palm oil and sit, at intervals, within hail of your 'cabano' and throw a medicine ball at you and give you dinner at the Luna – if you will. I did a crazy thing the night I left – took the fastest motor boat in Venice and flew to the Lido and looked at the moon, which was farcical, and lay on the sands and got bitten by sand-fleas, and vastly overpaid the motor-boat man, and came back god knows when in a 'vapore' and the slowest gondola in Venice. But it was exquisite and I loved it.

I think your husband (damned Socialist though he is By God) will be Prime Minister for a very very long time, because he has the Divine Spark which is almost lost nowdays, and getting less and less. They had it once – all of them. I've just been reading here a life of Chopin: a medium composer maybe, but a tremendous man. Broken by his own powers of emotional feeling – a hitch in some paltry love affair enough to send him to bed in a decline for months – what reduces us to inane guffaws reduced them to a temperature of 104, consumption, and death. The result being that they produced creative geniuses by the dozen – and what do we produce? The Lido beach. It's a little disheartening.

I'm so sorry about this outburst but I learnt with you what some have tried in vain to teach me – that the only possible thing to do is to steep oneself in the XVIIIth and early XIXth centuries and try to understand (if not try to catch a touch of) the spirit that moved them. For this – for the gondola, for the palatial drawing room, the food, the champagne, the fun both in and out of the water (bar that appalling boat that sank, and a dive I can never quite forget) the arguments (not least the one about Torcello) and the staggering hospitality in every direction – I thank you ...

Yours ever most gratefully and sincerely

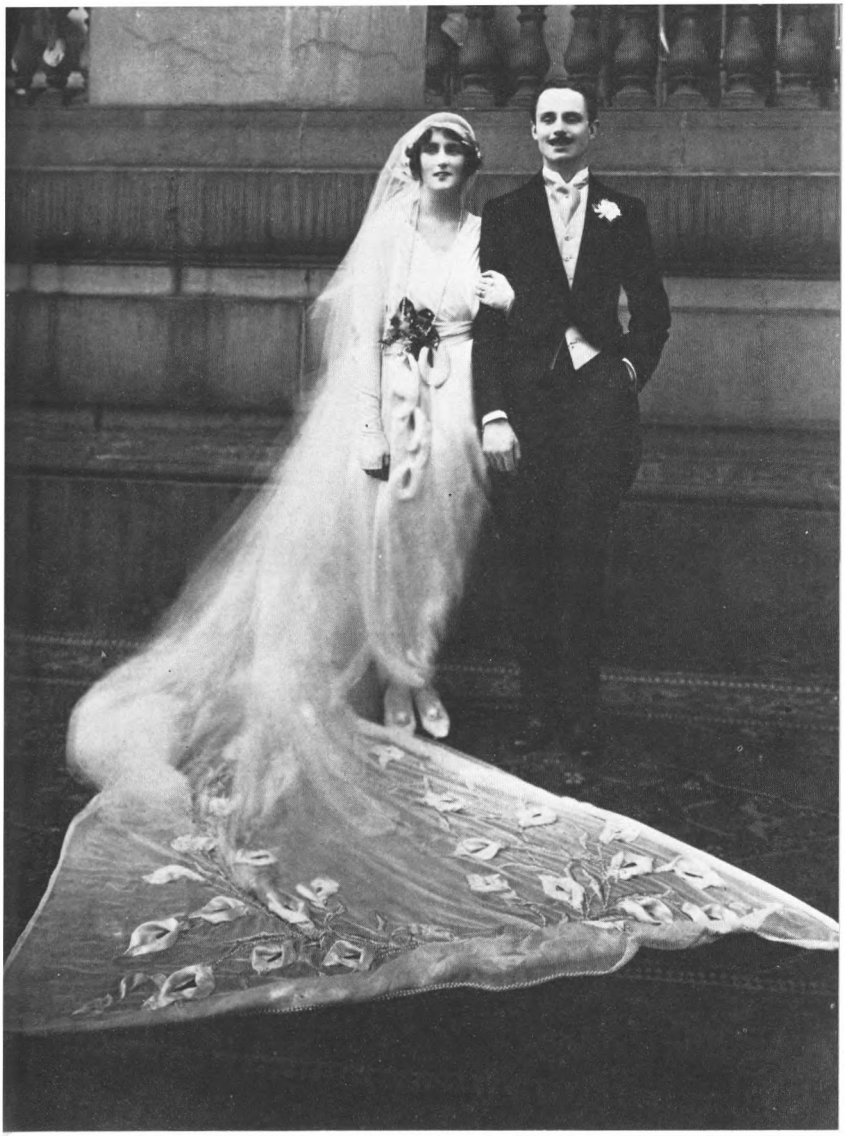
Bob Boothby

> PS. I am conscious of having been, on the whole, *not* a success. But I think I have *one* conquest to my credit. Mabel (that Great Woman) said 'Goodbye Old Man' – and I *thought* her voice broke.

There were many people who at this time wrote to Cimmie similar (if not so good) letters: they tell of her gaiety; of her ability to give enjoyment; of how under her attention people seemed to expand and feel transformed. This ability to produce warmth and wit in personal life seemed as important to her as was the ability to produce enthusiasm in the world of politics: it seemed important to Tom too, who got pleasure from social life far beyond the taking up of opportunities for flirtation and conquest. Before he had met Cimmie he had of course shone in this area, but perhaps without much ease: throughout his married life Tom depended for naturalness in social relationships largely on his wives. But in 1925 it would have been the problem for both him and Cimmie to try to relate – if they wanted to – the world of Venice and the South of France to that of the Birmingham and Clydeside politicians.

Sometimes Cimmie was warned of such a difficulty by more a serious voice than those of newspapers which continued to ask simply – How could anyone be a socialist and go to Venice and have fun? Tom's and Cimmie's answer to this sort of question continued sensibly to be – their money could be put to better socialist uses by themselves than if it was given away: also class barriers are genuine, and they can better be dealt with by suitably crossing them rather than by pretending they don't exist. But the trouble with this type of answer was that it had traditionally been held by socialists that it was just the possession of unearned money that was the evil in capitalist societies and not the uses to which it was put. (Lenin had remarked that a 'good' capitalist was worse than a bad one because he delayed the revolution.) A Marxist acquaintance wrote to Cimmie to ask – had she faced the serious dangers inherent in what she was trying to do?

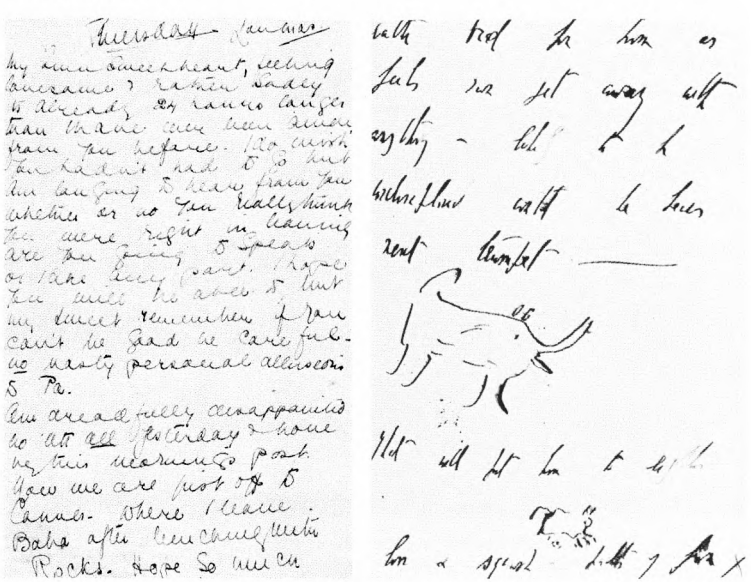
> You an aristocrat and I a petty bourgeois are equally unreliable in the world situation of today because however good our principles, honest our intentions, and steadfast our will, we cannot be relied on to crush in our own characters those inborn tendencies which carry us back to our own sets in any crisis – we *may* be faithful when the time comes, but we cannot be sure of it until the time. The declassed aristocrat and the declassed artist are individual tragedies which simply don't matter when civilisation is at stake. Within our private lives we may have compensations ...



Tom and Cimmie at their wedding in 1920

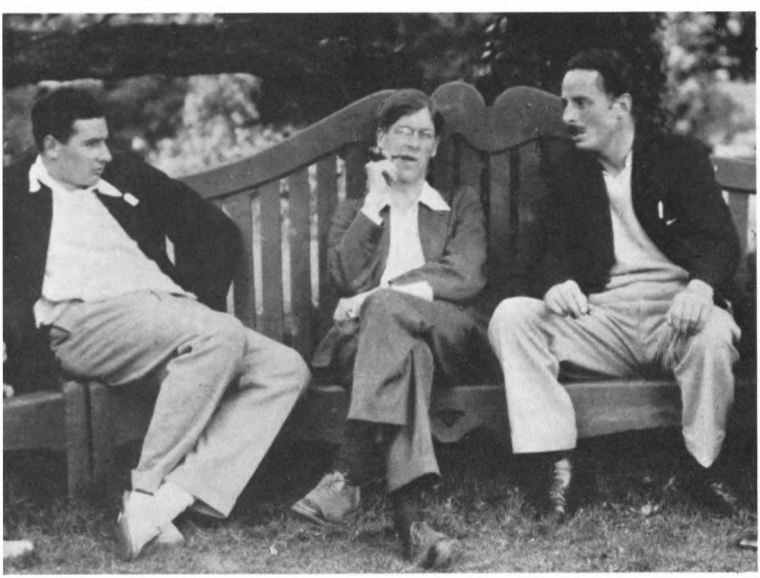
Nanny Hyslop, at Vivien's christening in 1921

Irene and Cimmie canvassing in Harrow

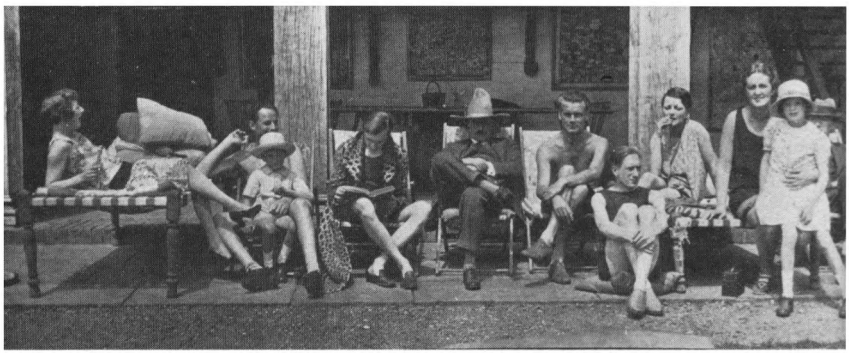


Letters from Cimmie to Tom, 1923 (left), and from Tom to Cimmie, 1925

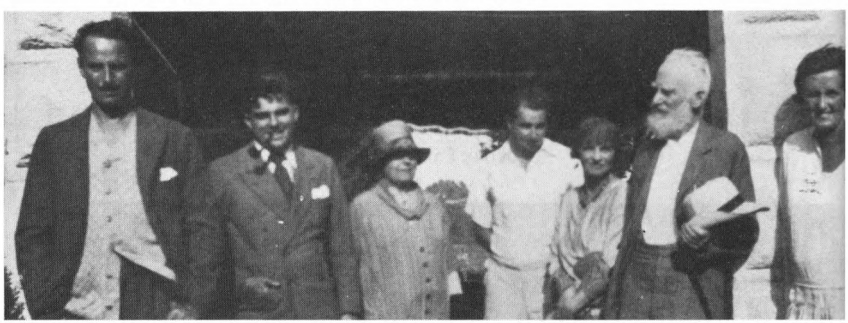
Savehay Farm



Independent Labour Party Summer School, 1926:
Fenner Brockway (centre) with John Strachey and Tom



On the loggia at Savehay Farm, 1927: Dina Erroll, Tom, Nicholas, Cecil Beaton, Ivan Hay, Dick Wyndham, William Walton, Georgia Sitwell, Cimmie, Vivien, Sacheverell Sitwell



South of France, 1928: Tom, Bob Boothby, Mrs Shaw, John Strachey, Eileen Orde, George Bernard Shaw, Cimmie

Antibes, 1929: Paul Casa Maury, Fruity Metcalfe, Baba Metcalfe, Tom, Rudolph Messel

Cimmie was never a Marxist: nor was Tom: the difference between their sort of socialism and communism was that they believed openly (communists might put their trust secretly) in the role of heroic leaders. But then there was still the business of having to explain to people – those whom they wished to vote for them for instance – how the 'compensations' of their private lives did not interfere with their commitment to the cause of the working class. B. A. Campbell (my putative godfather) wrote to Birmingham newspapers a sort of testimonial for Tom and Cimmie, after there had been renewed attacks on their private life:

> I happen to have had the intimate friendship of Mr Mosley and Lady Cynthia for many years, the last sixteen of which have been spent living in the heart of East London engaged in all forms of social work. Amongst many who have helped me in this work, not merely by giving money but by giving service, which those of us who share the lives of the people have learned to value far more than money, have been those two friends ... I may mention that, as far as they are concerned, the accusation of 'living in large country houses with motor cars and luxurious expenditure and making no kind of personal sacrifice for the poor' is not applicable. At present their town house is a very modest sized one (and by a curious coincidence condemned by the London County Council) ...

This sort of defence made sense on the level of words: it was what Tom and Cimmie themselves were good at. But the problem remained – What is the effect of such justification on reality?

There is a letter from Nancy Astor to Cimmie of this time in which she says – 'Tell Tom not to allow on a platform what he is not willing to do himself.' There had for some time been the feeling amongst Tom's old friends that his very skill with words might result in cutting-off from reality. It seemed that some testing would occur now he was with Labour.

But if Tom and even Cimmie were allowing themselves to be set up as people slightly above the normal run of things – as legendary – then how was it that they were to be tested? Tom made no pretence about the fact that he believed that it was his right, almost duty, to ask to be judged on a rather superhuman level. And Cimmie, in her capacity of being someone who liked to be adored, sometimes found herself for good or ill, stranded on this sort of level too.

Allan Young wrote to her:

> My wish for you is that you should be surrounded by friends who do not irritate, who do not criticise, who are never exacting, but who interest you and help you to express your real self . . .
>
> It is a great joy to me that in the circle in which I have met you you help me to understand the meaninglessness of material things. You make life less lonely because of your capacity to *'feel'*. Ideas and actions are the playgrounds of life – but to feel is to live greatly.

CHAPTER 10

Rules of the Game: Philandering

When Tom re-entered Parliament in January 1927 as Labour member for Smethwick he had for the first time both a policy and what must have seemed a suitable political base from which to launch it.

He was not popular in Parliament. He had first been Conservative, then an Independent, now he was Labour. He could say with justification that he had put his principles before party loyalties; that he had been right to explore different territories: but this was objectionable to those who felt strongly about party loyalties not only because they might distrust his motives but because they might feel guilty about their own – they might themselves feel more strongly about loyalties, that is, than about principles, because their livelihoods depended on their so doing while Tom's and Cimmie's did not.

There was also still Tom's arrogance, his air of disdain, his cutting tongue. Looking around in Parliament at the chosen representatives of society around him, he would remark 'A dead fish rots from the head down'. When people heckled him he referred to their 'zoological noises striving to attain the heights of human speech'. The Conservative Party was 'sublime mediocrity at the head of inveterate prejudice': Baldwin, its leader, was someone who 'may not be a good companion for a tiger hunt, even for a pig hunt; but every time he runs away he proves afresh the honesty of his convictions'. This was good stuff for the legend: it was of not much help in fostering the personal bonhomie which, apart from the battle, is necessary if there is to be any exercise of power according to the rules of a game.

To most MPs Parliament was a place where issues were raised, passions aired, votes taken: then after these activities had done their job as a safety-valve as it were, the machinery of government could be left to go on its way. Tom never saw Parliament like this: he imagined it

as a sort of officers' discussion-group before orders should be given for an attack. This was due to an ingrained habit partly of seeing contemporary circumstances as always on the edge of a crisis – 'Pleasant sleepy people are all very well in pleasant sleepy times, but we live in a dynamic age of great and dangerous events' – partly of assuming that the right methods of dealing with a crisis were those of war. In 1927 there was a certain justification for this attitude. He left his audiences in no doubt about how he saw the enemies at the gates.

> Unemployment, wages, rents, suffering, squalor and starvation, the struggle for existence in our streets; the threat of world catastrophe in another war; these are the realities of our present age. These are the problems which require every exertion of the best brains of our time for a vast constructive effort. These are the problems which should unite the nation in a white heat of crusading zeal for their solution. But these are precisely the problems which send Parliament to sleep. When not realities but words are to be discussed, Parliament wakes up. Then we are back in the comfortable pre-war world of make-believe: politics are safe again; hairs are to be split, not facts to be faced. Hush! do not awaken the dreamers! Facts will waken them in time with a vengeance.

In order to find an audience that would listen to what he had to say in the style which he felt suitable to say it in he went increasingly outside Parliament; he continued to address mass meetings in the midlands and in the north. He had already made his mark as a champion of the miners at the time of the General Strike in 1926: before it, he had in theory opposed the idea of a strike – he had thought both that it would not succeed and that if it did it would have meant revolution by violence. But when the strike was on he had backed it by organising, and paying for, the publication of a strike bulletin in Birmingham, and had given a considerable donation (£500) to the miners when their own strike dragged on into the autumn. From 1927 onwards he was a regular and popular speaker at the annual Durham Miners' Gala: he became a political and personal friend of the miners' leader Arthur Cook: he learned from him some of the rhythmical, hypnotic techniques of mob oratory. Beatrice Webb described Arthur Cook as being 'a mediumistic, magnetic sort of creature ... an inspired idiot, drunk with his own words, dominated by his own slogans'. Tom said that he had 'one of the coolest and best heads among the Labour leaders'. With the help of Arthur Cook and his union Tom was elected to the National Adminis-

trative Council of the Independent Labour party; then to the National Executive Council of the Labour Party itself. In Birmingham, where he seemed personally to be winning the city from the grip of the conservative Chamberlain family, Tom's legendary qualities were taking a bizarre hold: newspapers reported that children went through the streets singing 'Oswald is merciful! Oswald will save us!' There were cartoons of him in top hat and tails like a conjuror; then as an anarchist with a cloth cap and huge boots and a small man behind him with a bomb. Tom's characteristic reply to this sort of thing was just to complain that the cartoonist had not given him enough hair. There were also, inevitably, the cartoons about money: a money-bag labelled 'advantages of high birth and wealth' was being put away by Tom for the time being in a cloak room. But in fact of course Tom had no intention of hiding his money: he used some of it to buy an interest in one of the papers that was pursuing him – the *Birmingham Town Crier.*

In 1928 Tom's father died. He had lived apart from his wife and children for nearly thirty years. Recently there had been some rapprochement: his grandchildren (myself and Vivien, with Nanny and Granny) had been to visit him in 1924: there is a photograph of a rather young-looking middle-aged man like a professional cricketer holding me up like a trophy. Tom's mother had written to Tom – 'I'm trying hard to forget things that have made my life bitter for twenty five years.' But then there had been the Smethwick bye-election in 1926 and his father's story about Tom having been born with a golden spoon in his mouth, and Tom had again become bitter. When the news reached him that his father was dying Tom was in the South of France; he was in the middle of one of his long, hot summers; he declined to move in response to a telegram from his brother Ted. Ted, who was with their father who was himself in France, wrote 'I am disgusted to find that on the one occasion I have asked you to help me you have let me down ... I can assure you I should not have asked you to come here if I considered that your presence would disturb my father at this time.'

Tom went to the funeral: there is a photograph of him and his mother and his brothers at the graveside. In the South of France, just before he left, I remember Nanny telling Vivien and me that our grandfather had died, and so our father was now a baronet. I watched out of the window (so many childhood memories are of myself looking down at grown-ups out of windows) and saw my father on the terrace walking up and down, up and down; wondering, perhaps, about how both to be, and appear not to be, a baronet.

Tom was not mentioned in his father's will: it seemed to be becoming

a habit in the Mosley family that eldest sons should not be mentioned in their fathers' wills. But much of the family money had gone anyway to Tom from his grandfather over his father's head. His father left what money he had to his 'housekeeper Mary Elisabeth Hipkiss' who had 'served me faithfully and looked after me in various illnesses for over sixteen years'.

The question of family money is of interest because there was so much about it in the papers at the time that it seemed to have gone, like so many things about Tom, into legend. The rumours were that he was a multi-millionaire. It is difficult to give exact figures when so many family assets were in settlements, trusts, and property whose capital value could not be realised: but it seems that Tom, when his father died, came into control of an estate of about £250,000: before this he had had a yearly income from trustees of £8–10,000. Much of the estate however was in the form of land in Manchester which the Mosley family had once owned but which in the last century had been made over to leaseholders on 999-year leases – one less 9, my father used to say, and the family would indeed be multi-millionaires. But the income from this land was fixed: so that with inflation and the threat of further inflation it was difficult to find a buyer for the leases. Thus Tom was rich but not extravagantly so: and not nearly so rich as legend suggested. There was also, of course, Cimmie's income from the Leiter Trust – about £8 or 9,000 a year – but here there was no chance of the capital being touched.

Tom had found the dubieties of his financial position useful during the Smethwick by-election of 1926 when he had been able to say 'I own no lands and neither does my family: I doubt if there are half a dozen acres in the family.' This was after Rolleston had been sold, and just before Tom bought his 120 acres at Denham. But it is doubtful if the electors of Smethwick would have been put off even if Tom had not been able to play down the stories of his wealth. Such concerns were those of the newspapers: there was still little evidence of envy amongst the working class.

John Scanlon wrote in *The Decline and Fall of the Labour Party* with reference to workers' further reactions to Tom and Cimmie:

> Instead of believing that salvation for the working class would come from the working class, they still had the superstitious notion prevalent in all simple minds that salvation would come from above ... Heaven to them was a place where only rich people congregated and where was an abundance of rich food, rich drink and rich raiment.

> To most of them it was quite unattainable, and therefore when anyone chose to leave this perpetual nightclub in order to mix with the workers, their love and admiration knew no bounds.

The 'perpetual night-club' world which Tom and Cimmie were supposed to frequent and occasionally come down from for the delectation of the workers – this was a fancy that had some slight relevance to facts. But Tom and Cimmie had gone to great lengths to break out of the conventional upper-class night-club world; and it was more that they themselves descended to it only from time to time for their own delight. Upper-class London 'society' at this time consisted of about six hundred people (Tom used to say) who all knew each other and knew much of what was going on between each other but who kept this secret from the outside world: the rules of the game were like those which require honour amongst gangsters, that one should not talk. A view of this world, which is indeed like that of some hellish underworld, is provided by Cimmie's older sister Irene who kept a daily diary from 1926: in this she also provides contemporary glimpses of Tom and Cimmie. Irene had inherited the same income from the Leiter Estate as Cimmie had: on the death of her father in 1925 she had become a peeress in her own right – Baroness Ravensdale. (George Curzon had managed to have this subsidiary title created for himself in 1911 when it seemed certain he would have only daughters and no son: the title could pass for one generation through the female line but then had to revert to male inheritance – to the annoyance of my sister). Irene Ravensdale never married: she was rich, titled, and unencumbered by ties: in later life she did much good work with charities and with East End clubs in London, but mostly during these early years she did what she liked. The life that she lived was the sort of life that Cimmie and Tom might have led if they had not chosen to be socialist politicians.

Each winter she would go to Melton Mowbray for the hunting; there she kept a house with four or five servants, several horses, and a groom. She would hunt four or five days a week – with the Quorn, the Cottesmore or the Belvoir. Having exhausted herself and two or three horses during the day she would spend the evenings almost invariably playing poker or bridge – at which she lost also almost invariably. (Entries in her diary end with a phrase such as 'Lost £15 as usual' with the frequency of Pepys's 'And so to bed.') Often at night there were parties at which people quarrelled, tried to swap husbands and wives, and got drunk. When there was no hunting Irene would stay in bed till lunch time: much of the time she felt ill. She had lovers; but did not

find anyone for whom she would give up her freedom or who would take it on. When the hunting season was over she came with her servants to her London house for the summer season of parties and balls: there were special occasions like Derby Day, Ascot, the Eton and Harrow match; there were the Opera and gala matinees and tableaus; the night-clubs The Gargoyle and The Embassy. In the autumn she would travel, sometimes round the world – like a mythical figure in the expiation of some guilt. From time to time she drank too much, and she did a cure. She had hundreds of friends whom she loved and who said they loved her, but she was for the most part lonely. She was a good, warm hearted woman with nothing at this time to commit herself to.

Her relations with Cimmie and Tom were enigmatic. Cimmie had been her loved yet envied little sister when they were young: Cimmie had complained of her domineering ways. Then when Cimmie married and had children Irene seemed to claim a corner of these experiences. (When Vivien had been born she had written 'It is all so sacred, wonderful; it will remain in my mind as one of the great lovely mysteries'.) Tom told a story of how she had been to bed with him during some romp at Melton Mowbray; yet she was heavily censorious of Tom's extra-marital relationships and especially of causing Cimmie pain. She took no interest in Tom's and Cimmie's politics except for a week in 1929 when she went to canvass for Cimmie during her campaign at Stoke-on-Trent. In her diaries in their early days at least Tom appears as a rather fragile figure: Cimmie is still the envied sister. But it is likely that Irene saw and noted in her diaries mostly what she wanted to see.

Just after Tom's Labour victory in the 1926 election she was staying for Christmas with Nancy Astor at Cliveden – a powerhouse of conservatism. Irene observed:

> Cim and Tom came down to dinner and everyone was very decent to them tho' Geoffrey Dawson and Bob Brand hate him. They were both very pathetic – Tom even looking lonely and lost for once, tho' she was utterly at her ease. After dinner we played charades. Nancy Astor was inimitable as a rich Jew and a fat girl with that bulging mask, and Bobby as a tango teacher.

Another entry in another diary of this time seems to corroborate this unexpected view of Tom and Cimmie. Zita Jungman, who later became one of Cimmie's greatest friends, first met the Mosleys in August 1927 when she was taken by Bob Boothby to a picnic on the islands off the

coast of Cannes. She had not expected, from what she had heard, to like Tom; but in the event she found him gentle and attentive and it was Cimmie who was – 'pretty, rather fat, strong, and ruthlessly direct'.

That Tom appeared vulnerable at this time does not in fact conflict with the other view of him as the dashing, debonair buccaneer. Newspaper reports of him talked of his 'distinguished bearing, singularly handsome face, much charm of manner'; but also that – 'shyness still hides the reckless spirit which is shown by his political career'. Part of his charm and ability to get away with things was that at this time he could appear to be both savagely dominating and yet open to being hurt: like this he had something of the attractiveness of a child. Both in politics and in private life people looked up to him and sometimes wanted to protect him: this is perhaps a characteristic of people who succeed in leadership. It was only later that Tom seemed to be the potentially all-powerful figure whom people thought might do everything himself.

Certainly in front of Cimmie there was something of the child still in him that liked to show off, to be given approbation, as well as to be looked up to. In 1927 Tom and Cimmie began to see more of her younger sister, Baba, who in 1925 had married Major Edward 'Fruity' Metcalfe – who was known as the Prince of Wales's best friend. Tom liked to tease Baba: to be boyish in front of both her and Cimmie. He wrote to Cimmie:

> Today lunched with Fruity and Baba – showed them the new Bentley. Babs very envious and says we now 'stink of money'. Bentley is marvellous, but I break into a sweat when I think of the mutton at the wheel. With this light body acceleration is terrific – much more than Merc – you are up to anything in a few yards – must be careful. Body very good but a trifle flash. Silver wheels and red seats!

He liked showing off to Cimmie too, about his harmless social conquests. Once when Cimmie was in Stoke-on-Trent and Tom was in London he was asked to dinner by Sylvia, the wife of his brother Ted. He wrote:

> Wednesday night dined with Sylvia. She elected to appear for the occasion in a bright scarlet costume – everything blazing red from her lips to the heels of her shoes. Afterwards she desired to go to the Embassy Club. I advanced rather diffidently across the floor behind this 'People's Banner' but nevertheless our entry appeared to cause a

certain sensation. Even the granite features of Lord Blandford assumed a momentary mobility.

About Tom's more serious flirtations it is difficult to tell just what, at this time, Cimmie thought. It was a convention of the world in which she moved and had been brought up that husbands were expected to take some interest in other people's wives: their own wives seemed to have evolved a state of mind by which they both did and did not notice what was going on. There were rules-of-the-game about what was acceptable; and so long as Tom kept to these – the purpose of which was to ensure that the whole business remained somewhat childlike – then Cimmie could perhaps treat him as her naughty boy. For a time Tom did seem to stick to the rules. He would go over to Paris, which was a different world; there he had a mistress called Maria. (When he came across her later in America and sent her flowers and asked when he could see her she replied 'Darling friend, I prefer not to see you at all and have very good reasons for that.') Perhaps the reason then was that Tom was by this time pursuing Blanche Barrymore, the wife of John Barrymore, the actor: she herself was an actress who used, Tom remarked in his autobiography, to act Hamlet in competition with her husband. Perhaps this pursuit was stagey enough to come within the rules of the game. Also in a manner stagey but not, one would have thought, within any recognisable rules, was his brief affair with his step-mother-in-law, Grace Curzon; with whom, at St Moritz, while Cimmie skied (Tom could not ski because of his injured leg) he would drive around in a horse-drawn sledge. Tom would usually go after the women who would be the biggest challenge to him by possessing the greatest prestige. He never, like his father-in-law George Curzon, saw the point of pursuing anyone who might not be passed off as upper-class.

Thus when he became Labour and a whole new game might have opened up because this was the time when to be left-wing and intellectual was to be an advocate of easy free love – Tom did not take very enthusiastic advantage of this situation. He had a brief walk-out with one of the wives at the ILP summer school: but soon after this he coined a witty slogan – Vote Labour: sleep Tory – and reverted to type. He became involved with the wife of a Conservative MP who managed to get hold of a photograph of Tom without any clothes on (this was Tom's own story): the photograph was passed round the Tory benches while Tom from the Labour front bench was making a speech: Tom, made aware of what was going on by the resulting laughter, considered that this was outside the rules of any game and threatened a fight.

For almost the first ten years of her marriage it does not seem from her letters that Cimmie kicked up much of a fuss about all this: she felt that, the rules being what they were, Tom would always return to her: she seemed essential to him, politically and personally. It was essential politically that there should be no public scandal: but it was personally that he still seemed dependent on her in spite of what he admitted were his 'tiresome ways'. He would assure her of this dependence in his adoring, child-like letters full of baby-talk and drawings of animals: he would call her 'My own blessed Moo Moo': 'My own darling baby bleater': 'His own darling soft-nosed wog-tail'. He would sign himself by his own baby-names – porker, mutton: he would dash off his drawings of animals in his wild primitive hand. All this –itself a game – was to show that the other game – that of affairs and flirtations – was the lesser: it could not stand up to the heartfelt, caring, genuine dependence of children-husbands on their mother-wives.

Own Beloved,

Promise be happy. Don't work too hard. Rest and be strong for lots of fun Friday. Does love her so. If he didn't he wouldn't be tiresome. Life impossible without her.

Or:

Wishes he could make his mutt [drawing of animal] less of a goat [drawing of animal with horns] loves her so.

And Cimmie would reply:

My belovedest,

It was so wick of me to have wasted that whole long day when I had you and now when you aren't here my heart aches for you. I will really try and be bet, not maddening or cross, but do believe nearly all my stupidity comes from excess of love which makes me often overwrought, not anything else. I so frightfully love you and do above everything in the world want to be a perfect wife to you ...

Oh my Bill I do so adore you, my lovely one, so beautiful and so brave, such a clever one and so tender and beloved. Such a hero and yet such a baby boy. Your own Moo moo.

Cimmie and Tom were now approaching the zenith of their political

and social careers. Their progress in the Labour Party was still triumphant: the Tory press campaign against them was wearing off. Tom was even being asked to write articles by Lord Beaverbrook. People were beginning to speak of him as a future Prime Minister. The house at Denham was filling at weekends with people from the more exotic and enlightened fringes of the 'perpetual night-club world': also with writers and musicians and painters and designers – Sacheverell Sitwell, William Walton, Cecil Beaton, Oliver Messel. These mixed in with the old political friends – John Strachey, Bob Boothby. All these people felt perhaps closest to Cimmie; but Tom was the attraction. However much people felt him somewhat removed, awkward, they caught the glow of his company. This sort of social life at Denham was interspersed with visits from constituency socialists or representatives from the Durham Miners Gala. Cimmie had her 'ups and downs': she wrote that her curse was to be 'either so frightfully hap or so frightfully mis'. Tom came and went like (as a French journalist put it) 'the young Alcibiades . . . driving too fast in a big car, trailing after him many entangled hearts, many sarcasms, and a few confidences'. And somewhere in the middle of all this were the children telling themselves stories about how to get somewhere on a raft.

CHAPTER 11

Savehay Farm

Into the peaceful mundane world at Savehay Farm which consisted of myself and Vivien, Nanny, Mabel and May, and Mr Streeter the gardener in his cottage beyond the woodshed, there would erupt from time to time, like Vikings in their long-boats from the east, invaders, who were my mother's and father's weekend guests. Then there would be the business, for myself at least, of being always ready, like some villager, to hide. Savehay Farm was a good house within and around which to observe without being observed: there were the nooks and crannies I had discovered in my explorations with my sister Vivien: there were vantage points from which one could look down, as I liked to look down, upon the behaviour of these sophisticated hordes. There was a way out from the first floor nursery across a sort of roof-patio and then in through another door to a gallery above a loggia. Within this loggia some of the more esoteric rites of the grown-up world took place – the conversation, the badinage, the drinking, the horseplay – and even if a watcher were on the point of being caught, there was a further escape-route at the far end of the gallery which went across a cluttered loft with a ceiling too low to allow for easy pursuit and down into a mysterious area known as the End Room where were stored huge trunks containing bric-a-brac from the time when my mother had been a child in India: and this refuge was almost impregnable, because the key of the door from the outside had nearly always been lost.

Once or twice a year there were seasonal invasions of a type different from usual: enormous trestle tables would be set up on the lawn: tea-urns and trays of sandwiches would be carried from vans: then masses of people wearing thick dark suits and with hats would emerge from buses and would stand about looking cheerful like people do when they think they might be photographed. These were Labour party workers

from Smethwick or Stoke: the occasion was known as The Garden Party. This festivity was especially terrifying for children because the impression had been given that it was more than an arbitrary duty for them to appear – it was a moral and political duty – something that might be of importance in their parents' careers. So there we were, my sister and I, amongst the tea and buns and smiling faces like victims being led to sacrificial altars.

At another time of year there would be tents like those of Red Indians suddenly in the field across the river: large boys in long khaki shorts would appear carrying pots and pans: in the evenings they would sit round a camp fire and sing songs. These were the denizens of Mr B. A. Campbell's Paddy's Goose Boys' Club, on their annual holiday outing. With regard to them, too, there seemed to be some sort of moral obligation to go and visit: grown-ups even suggested that one might cheerfully join in their sad songs.

But for the most part the weekend invaders were as unlike constituency party workers or members of the Paddy's Goose club as could be imagined. On Saturday mornings in the summer garden-beds of wood and webbing would be set out in front of the loggia: mattresses and coloured cushions would be arranged; there would be a portable gramophone and perhaps an umbrella; it was as if a stage-set were being prepared for some ballet. Then in twos and threes from the house where they had arrived the night before when the children had been in bed or from the place where cars were parked by Mr Streeter's cottage there would emerge the people who were my mother's and father's special friends: the men perhaps in white trousers and dark blue jackets: the women in short skirts with waists falling down towards their knees. They would gather round the beds in front of the loggia: they would laugh, talk, recline; they would sway in front of each other like reeds. But what on earth were they *doing*? And what were they *saying*? All this was observed with eyes through some slit-hole at the bottom of a window; on hands and knees in the gallery above the loggia. These representatives of the grown-up world always seemed to be *acting*: they would gesture, jerk their hands in their pockets, fiddle with pearls; but who were they acting *to*; and what was it *for*? A man might go down on one knee, a hand on his heart, as if making some passionate declaration: a woman would lean back, kick her legs in the air; but was this in acceptance or disdain? There would be lunges, shrieks, and cumbersome runnings-after. Someone would be caught, and carried, and dumped on a bed: but were all these struggles yes or no? Of course, it was all a game. But did anyone win? And was it fun?

The portable gramophone would be wound up with a handle and play tunes like *Just A Gigolo* or *You're Driving Me Crazy*: people might dance a little in a desultory, am-I-or-am-I-not-being-watched way. They would do this as if in front of cameras: often, in fact, there was a camera – my mother had a primitive box-like cine-Kodak that you held at your waist and looked down into: she was one of the first people to make home movies fashionable. In front of the camera people of course were expected to perform: they would do the Charleston flicking their legs sideways and back; they would put their arms round each other's waists and trip to and fro like Sugar Plum Fairies. They did not seem to be involved so much in dancing as in the business of trying to find out what to do about being watched. A few games would begin: two men would get down on their backs on the lawn; they would face one another and each would put a leg up and hook it round the leg of the other; the object was to force the other person over on to the back of his head. The women would hop about like birds round carrion. Then there was a game in which two people were blindfolded and lay on the lawn and held hands and whacked at each other with rolled-up newspapers: this was called, for some reason, *Are You There Moriarty?* When all this had gone on for some time the women would drift back to the beds and perhaps file their nails and croon snatches to the gramophone.

There were more formal games. Half way down the drive there were two tennis courts side by side: I do not remember anyone playing much serious tennis. The point seemed to be the badinage, usually in mixed doubles. My aunt Irene had a very slow underarm service that her opponents could deal with as they liked, depending on what they felt about my Aunt Irene. When my father served he would flash his eyes at the same time as he flashed his racket and he seemed to be trying to hit his partner on the back of the neck.

There was even a realistic duelling game that the men played on the lawn: they would dress up in fencing jackets and masks; they would march away from each other back to back carrying pistols; then would turn and fire with bullets of uninjurious wax. The women would watch this as if rather at a loss: traditionally, had not women liked men fighting over them with some danger of death?

There was a thing called a pogo-stick with a spring on the bottom on which you jumped up and down like a kangaroo. One day Dick Wyndham slipped and broke his jaw: there was a queer funeral cortege down to the river – to throw in not Dick Wyndham, but the pogo-stick.

In the river there was swimming from a wooden landing-stage or

diving-board in an area that was supposed to have been cleared of weeds by Mr Streeter in the punt. We children were allowed to bathe here as soon as we could swim. There were stories of how weeds stretched up like tentacles and dragged you down.

We would fish with nets for tiddlers in the river. Sometimes the movements of grown-ups seemed to be curiously like those of fish; they would seem all to be facing one way; then they would suddenly dash off and face in another.

One summer at Savehay Farm the play-acting did seem to have some practical or rather aesthetic point: my mother and father set out to make, with their box-like camera, a film with a story. What the story was is obscure since only one uncut reel of it survived: the rest was tidied and burned by a house-maid in the South of France who thought that the bits and pieces in the process of being cut and stuck together were rubbish. From the one reel it seems that my mother was a dairy maid who was being pursued by both John Strachey and Dick Wyndham – the former was some sort of rustic, and the latter a dashing man who turned up in the Bentley. These two had a terrible fight on the big bridge over the river: first John Strachey got hurled into the water; then he climbed out and ran back on to the bridge and hurled Dick Wyndham into the water; this scene seemed to be repeated, over and over. Then there was a brothel scene in which Cecil Beaton was the *Madame* made up to look like Margot Asquith: one of the girls in her charge was, again, my mother. Dick Wyndham returned in the Bentley and there was another struggle – with revealing close-ups of legs and thighs. Towards the end of all this Cecil Beaton went off to drown himself in the river; but it was his wig that kept on coming off and floating away like Ophelia. There was an odd blind boy, very beautiful, played by Stephen Tennant; who sat and made daisy chains by the river.

All this was scripted, directed, and filmed by my father. It was shot in a rather German-expressionist style, with reflections in water of poplar trees and clouds moving.

One of the more bizarre activities that grown-ups liked to indulge in at weekends was to play practical jokes on one another. In the downstairs lavatory there was a box which held the paper and when you pulled a snake jumped out: Olga Lynn had hysterics, and the door of the lavatory had to be broken down. Then there was a story of how my father once arranged to have soap on toast served to his dinner guests as a savoury: Oliver Messel was warned by Mabel the parlour maid, and went behind a screen with a pack of cards which he let fall to the floor thus making a sound as if he were being sick. Nanny used

to recount to us these stories: it seemed to be accepted that they were about just the sort of things that grown-ups did.

Nanny, in fact, had her own fund of such stories, which we children asked her to recount to us over and over again. When she had been a nurserymaid in the employment of George Curzon she had stayed in the house of his father, Lord Scarsdale, where there was a butler who tyrannised over the other servants. One day Nanny, and her great friend Sarah the still-room maid, put some sherbet in the butler's pot, so that when he peed at night it foamed: he, too, was supposed to have had some sort of fit. Then there was Lord Scarsdale himself who was known to be mean about food: one night Nanny and her friend were having a midnight snack when they heard a scuffling outside their bedroom door and they opened it and found Lord Scarsdale on his hands and knees trying to see underneath. The impression from all these stories was that, of course, the grown-up world was mad: why else, indeed, did they have to have people like nannies to tell us stories about them?

In the evenings after guests had gone my sister and I would come down to the Garden Room where there were the glass walking sticks on the walls and we would pick up bits of family life after the invasion. My mother would read to us or at a slightly later date would play with us one of the upper-middle-brow games that she had played as a child with her father. There was the game called 'I see' in which a famous historical scene was described and the children had to guess (or rather to know) what it was – Julius Caesar on his way to the Senate: Napoleon on St Helena. Sometimes my mother would rope in my father to describe a scene; but after a time he would get bored, and begin – I see a tall dark handsome man – and we would all start groaning, because we knew he was describing himself. Similarly if my father was ever prevailed on to play the enervating game of compiling lists of famous men beginning with a certain letter he would with mysterious quickness finish his list and wait till the end of the allotted time and then when invited to read out his list would announce just – whatever the letter – Mosley! And so there would be more groans: and my father's strange clicking laugh. I continued to think this sort of thing very funny. This was the pattern of my father with his children: he would become the joker: he would be no longer distant, removed: what better could he do?

Then there were more of the strange mantras, or slogans, that he used to declaim in response to what he might feel were unnatural demands on him. On the comparatively rare occasions on which all the family were having a meal together and Vivien and I were being obstreperous

and he was appealed to to keep order, he would intone, with the far-away look in his eye:

> Let us see if Nicky can
> Be a little gentleman
> Let us see if Viv is able
> To behave herself at table –

Or if there was some dispute about plans – between our two aunts, for example, who kept up a rivalry sometimes about who should do what with which of the children – he would murmur just:

> Whoever would you rather be –
> Aunty Baa or Aunty Nee –

and then would drift off, laughing again, leaving myself at least thinking that something magical had happened. I did not know why: I think it was something to do with grown-ups being able to laugh at their own pretensions.

There were the other sayings my father would use to discourage earnest personal speculation. When the question came up, as it often did, about the oddity of his emergence from his background, he would declaim, as alternatives to the 'when fire meets oil then springs the spark divine' remark quoted earlier:

> The Lily, its roots dug deep in the dung of the earth, yet rears its glorious head to heaven –

Or –

> Nurtured as I was in the rough usages of camp and field –

Or –

> Staffordshire born and Staffordshire bred
> Fat in the bottom and fat in the head –

all these being said as throwaway lines, real or made-up quotations, self-mockery to do away with boredom or embarrassment. Then there was a line that he would intone as he entered the sea to swim in the Mediterranean – And bluer the sea-blue stream of the bay – which meant that he was peeing.

My father was an arch-manipulator of words: it seemed that at these moments he was mocking the pretensions of words. But there were also his rages.

He never directed any violence against us children – except perhaps once, when Vivien and I had been having a fight in the rose-garden and Vivien, accidentally, had kicked me in the balls and I had flopped about like a footballer in the penalty area. My father hauled Vivien up to his room and smacked her. He examined me solicitously. But this incident stands out for its rarity.

The scarcity of memories about my mother has resulted in those scenes that do remain being lit portentously. There was a day in London when my mother and father and Vivien and I were walking along the Mall (this is by far the clearest memory I have of my mother and father in relation to each other): we were turning up by St James's Palace and my mother was asking me why I did not like the child of one of her friends whom she had hoped I would like; I was saying I did not know why: (I cannot remember now how much in fact I did not know or how much I was declining to pass on childhood secrets). My mother was saying that of course I must know – that if one had feelings about not liking someone one must be able to describe them – and I was beginning to feel miserable: I was thinking – surely, feelings are sometimes too complicated to be put just into words? My father was walking ahead with my sister Vivien: my mother called out to him – Was it not correct, would he not say, that if one had feelings then these could be put into words? I remember my father turning, at the bottom of St James's Street, and saying no, surely, there were some feelings that could not well be put into words. I think I felt some sort of liberation.

But it was about this time, when I was about seven, that I began quite badly to stammer. My mother had recorded in notes that she made about our early childhood – 'Vivien was inclined to be a bit bossy and Nic was led a good deal of a dance always having to play second string, he was much more highly strung than her, and occasionally used to have stammering fits.' But my own consciousness that I stammered came later when both my mother and my nanny in the night nursery – this scene again is portentously etched – were standing over me and telling me earnestly that I must try to speak carefully: up to that time I had not realised that I did not. There is a lesson to be learned by parents here: if your child stammers, do not remark on this when he or she is young: the stammer may naturally go: but if you remark on it, the child has to struggle and the stammer may get dug in.

There are psychological theories about stammering that have seemed

to me to make sense. One is that it is a sort of protection against the verbal aggression of others (it is difficult to be rude or sarcastic towards a stammerer): another and deeper theory is that it is a protection against the stammerer's own potential aggressiveness towards others – an aggressiveness which, without the stammer, would be alarming. But it has seemed to me also that stammering on some level is simply a protest against a too easy flow of words; against one's own and other people's terrible tendency to bury living things under a verbal lava-flow.

In the notes that my mother made in her photograph book of our childhood were sayings attributed to me at an early age: one was 'Isn't it lucky that Mummy didn't marry Mr Strachey?' Another – 'I think we are really dead, and we think all this is a dream.'

In my mother's Garden Room, when she was away, there were certain explorations to be made amongst the piles of glossy magazines that lay on a table behind the sofa. Some of these magazines had been sent from Russia; some from Paris. In the former there were pictures of enormous industrial complexes with pipes and cones and spheres: these seemed like very advanced children's toys. In the magazines from Paris there were reproductions of modern paintings and drawings which took one out of the world of toys towards some secret that might lie at the back of the grown-up world. There were women with no clothes on lying on their backs with their knees in the air – Egon Schiele perhaps. But why was this so strange? And apparently for grown-ups as well as for children?

At the not-often-used end of the house on the ground floor beneath my mother's and father's bedroom there was a panelled hall with portraits of Mosley ancestors on the walls: these were almost the only relics (apart from library books) that had been saved from my father's abandonment of Rolleston. Each year after the Christmas Tree had been cleared away (here we had circled to the incantation of porker, porker) for the rest of the winter I was allowed to make this room my own. Here I would set about building or rebuilding – the Mosley ancestors looking primly or benignly down – a whole model village, a landscape, an estate: the basis of this was a beautifully made set of toys called The Belgian Village (given to us children, I think, by my mother's childhood friend the Queen of the Belgians). This consisted of houses, gardens, churches, shops, inns; it could be set out on the floor of the empty hall and extended into parkland, farmyards, animals, railways, cars, buses – these taken from my other sets of toys. Thus a whole new world could be created; which unlike much of the real world was orderly, aesthetic and exact. I would work at this painstakingly through much of the

winter holidays: the task, and the result, seemed to be of mysterious significance. I knew it would be cleared away by Nanny and May the housemaid in the spring: but it could always be taken out of its boxes again and made the same and yet slightly different: and perhaps it was this ordering of something beautiful that seemed to make life worth while.

CHAPTER 12

Labour Politics

In 1927 Cimmie, in the train to Dover wrote to Tom, who was at 8 Smith Square:

> Sweetie old boy, be a happy one and be a good one – miss his Mum a good deal but don't get plooey. Get Mabel to fix up people to come and see you. Try and make the Docs start doing something in the way of treatment. Anyway suggest a tonic to keep your strength up.
>
> Why not also have the spermy doc to see you as well, his add is on envelope on dressing table, name of Kenneth Walker. Talk to Kirkwood about the French specialist from Bagnolles and get Mabel to ring Eva up and find out when he is coming over.
>
> Darling fellow let's have loveliest happiest time yr 31st year. I will do all I can. As well as our work-y good times let's have fun-y good times. Let's really try and achieve the ideal modus vivendi! *I do so love you* and as well as that I'm frightfully fond of you for yr sake too. Feels like a Mum as well as a Mistress (can one be the Whore as well as the Bore or vice versa?)
>
> I do think we are trying to give better chances and more happiness to people in general and ought to give just our 2 selves a really good chance too – a chance to be a better happier couple than any other – it would help in the long run and I am quite sure we have a duty to ourselves as much as to everyone else. A Frenchman opp has just blown his nose and released by flourishing his hanky such an odious cloying scent I feel sick. H. G. Wells on the train, can't make up my mind whether to speak to him or not.
>
> Let's arrange a party soon after I'm back (if you're well) and go to Greta Garbo.
>
> Love and kisses my belovedest.

Don't leave this about it is stilted and restrained as it is just for that very fear.

Loves him Loves him Loves him Loves him.

Does think him a bloody marvel, really, and as the train rushes her farther and farther away is inclined to reconsider her opinion that he is evil and wick (doubtful tho') and thinks – Oh Hell, I don't know what I think.

But I do know you are often a pet and adorable and are quite without rival in public life and that all the time I love you except when I hate you so much it must come quite near to love and be mixed up with it. God bless your schemes and plans. Don't get fed up with the silly old Labs yet awhile. Give Jimmy my love and fix up some NAC fun for me. Play your new grammy and think lovingly and kindly of your Simple Sincere Suburban Sim!!

It seems that at the time Tom was quite often ill or on the edge of being ill: or he was something of a hypochondriac; he liked to put his trust in glamorous doctors whether or not there was very much for them to cure. But he had genuine recurring trouble with his injured leg. Cimmie wrote to him from Stoke-on-Trent – 'My poor sweetie old fellow I am miserable at your being phlebitic it really does seem that yr troubles are unending and cumulative (is that the right word?) always piling up – oh I am just longing for Tues when we can settle peacefully down to being normal decently idle creatures.' Ramsay MacDonald wrote to Cimmie regretting 'that Tom's illness is to drag', but making a date with her to go to the theatre.

In October 1928 Tom and Cimmie went on a motor trip with Ramsay MacDonald to Vienna, Prague and Berlin. In Berlin MacDonald addressed the Reichstag and made a passionate plea for disarmament: the press seemed more interested in Cimmie's clothes. 'Lady Cynthia, the famous champion of the proletariat, was in an evening frock of grey tissue with a rich grey cloak ... slowly, and with an air which a great actress might envy, she went to the place assigned to her followed by her husband and Mr Ramsay MacDonald ... a shawl of snowy white ermine fell from her gracious shoulders.'

While in Berlin Tom and Cimmie were taken round the night clubs by Harold Nicolson who was Counsellor at the British Embassy. Tom wrote about this in his autobiography – 'Cimmie and I had never seen anything like it ... the sexes had simply changed clothes, make-up and habits of nature ... scenes of decadence and depravity suggested a nation sunk so deep that it could never rise again. Yet within two or three years

men in brown shirts were goose-stepping down these same streets round the Kurfurstendamm'. Tom does not seem in this description to have been being ironic.

Ramsay MacDonald did not go with them on the tour of the night clubs: his own raffish behaviour on this trip was to do with becoming involved again with an Austrian lady who had previously been his mistress. Tom too became involved in this affair. In a passage which he dictated for his autobiography but then left out he told the story of this odd incident and its aftermath.

> In Vienna we met a woman who as a type seemed to me something of an old Viennese tart: faded blonde, very sophisticated, very agreeable. And being young people, and never thinking that people much older than ourselves could have love affairs, Cimmie and I thought nothing of it. In Vienna the old pair used to go and look at museums.
>
> A month or two later MacDonald suggested that we all go down to Fowey in Cornwall, and named the party which he wanted to take – a gay party and altogether different from MacDonald's colleagues. Just before we went he said to me 'My little Austrian friend whom we met in Vienna is in England. It would be such fun if she could come. Will you explain it to the others?' So we said all right. He used to read poetry to her, and they wandered off together making a strange couple.
>
> Then we went into the election. We fought it and we won, and I found myself sitting in the Treasury as Chancellor of the Duchy. Then one day I was informed that a Mrs so-and-so wanted to speak to me. I said 'I'm delighted to hear you're in London but we're all very busy'. She said 'I'm living in a flat in Horseferry Road,' – at that time almost a slum area – 'I've got serious news for you. The Government may fall. I must tell you'.
>
> So I went round and there was this old girl. She said 'I rang you up, you're very young, but you're the only man in this government who knows anything of the world at all. So I had better tell you'.
>
> She went on 'I'll come straight to the point. I was once a very rich woman. The Prime Minister, when I used to meet him in Switzerland, was a very poor man and I helped him a lot in those days. Now he's got the whole Treasury of Great Britain behind him.'
>
> So I said 'Dear Lady, you can't have the Prime Minister putting his hand in the public Treasury to support his lady friends.'

Then she got very nasty. She said 'I went to Downing Street, I was admitted, and I told him I had to get some money. He saw me in the Cabinet Room and became completely hysterical and began to bang his head against the wall. Isobel came in in the middle of this performance. Then he took me by the shoulders and pushed me out in front of all the porters in Downing Street.'

I always remember how her story ended – 'I fall down, I break my lorgnettes, my eyes they are blinded with tears. The policeman, he pick me up and put me in a taxi'.

So I told her it was terribly shocking, the Prime Minister was tired and overworked.

She replied 'I've got letters from him. You know, he's a very innocent man and he wrote to me letters which were pornographic. They were written from Lossiemouth in his own handwriting but he's cut off Lossiemouth with a pair of scissors.'

I said to her 'Now look, no newspaper will publish them here, and if you try to blackmail the Prime Minister he will be Mr X in court and you'll go down for 10 or 20 years.'

She knew a trick worth two of that. 'You may be able to stop me here, but I shall go to the Quai d'Orsay and the whole thing will blaze in the French press.'

So then I pulled a real bluff, because you can imagine in a Labour government anything of that kind would wreak havoc. But with her being a central European I thought she might fall for it. I said to her 'Do you really think a British Government is going to be brought down by one lonely woman? You have no friends, you have no helpers at all. You've got to go by train to Dover and on the channel boat to Paris. Do you think you are ever going to get to France?'

It worked. She was in floods of tears. She said 'Please, I want to leave, please don't!' I said 'Of course not, we're friends, everything will be gentle. Take the advice of a good friend, don't go near the Quai d'Orsay, very, very, dangerous. Go back to Vienna as fast as you can get.'

As Tom told the story, there were further repercussions. Years later, when he had founded the British Union of Fascists, he was approached by a man who wanted to join him who had previously been a secret service agent: this man told Tom that the flat in Horseferry Road had in fact been bugged so that the incident, and Tom's part in it, was known to the security people. And the story, the man said, had continued – the

Austrian lady had indeed returned to Vienna but then had reappeared in 1931 or 1932 and 'Jimmy Thomas was sent with £3,000 of Abe Bailey's money to buy the letters ... he went to Paris, met her there, came back without the three thousand and without the letters.'

Then many years later, Tom related, Charles Mendl, who had been at the British Embassy in Paris, told Tom that he had once seen the allegedly pornographic letters and that all he remembered of them was a poem which contained the line –

Porcupine through hairy bowers shall climb to paradise.

Back in 1928 – it seemed that Tom and Cimmie were in various ways trying to make themselves useful to Ramsay MacDonald. He came down to Savehay Farm to work: he was photographed writing a draft of his election manifesto in the loggia. There was even talk that in a future Labour government Tom might be made Foreign Secretary. But Ramsay MacDonald's way of going round with the rich and fashionable had led to hostile comment within the Labour Party: Beatrice Webb wrote sourly of MacDonald's liking for 'the Mosleys, De la Warrs, and other lithe and beauteous forms – leaders of fashion or ladies of the stage attended by 6ft tall and well groomed men'. And it might even have been true, as Harold Nicolson wrote later, that 'Cimmie Mosley's hold on Ramsay is one of the things that makes it difficult for Tom to be specially favoured.' Also Ramsay MacDonald might have sensed a growing hostility to himself in Tom at this time: it was their Berlin trip, Tom wrote later, that first opened his eyes to 'the deep element of hysteria' in Ramsay MacDonald's nature: such men might be 'figures of infinite worthiness, the models of public virtue and private decorum': but because they were 'products of the Puritan tradition' they were 'entirely different animals in all things, great and small, to the masters of action whom history has revealed to our judgement'. This feeling arose, he would explain, not of course as a result of the discovery that Ramsay MacDonald had a mistress but because of his failure to deal with the situation with dispatch. But Tom made his own odd calculations in this area: and in the coming three or four years he might at times have reflected back on himself the comment he made on Ramsay MacDonald – 'It seems to me that men in high office ought to live like athletes ... statesmen are poor fish if even for the few years at the height of their responsibilities they cannot be serious'.

There was some confusion at the heart of the Labour Party about what should be a proper attitude to puritanism. One strand of Labour

thinking, represented by the ILP, was dedicated to socialism as if to some kind of puritan religion: this was in the tradition of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky: socialists had to keep clear of even social contacts with establishment ways of living for fear of almost moral contamination. But this had never been the attitude of the majority of Labour parliamentarians: for them, just as socialism would evolve out of capitalism without a revolution, so new social attitudes might be grafted without too much trouble on to the old. It was Tom, ultimately, who became distrusted by both sides in the confusion – by the puritans for being too much of a rake, and by the compromisers for being too much of a rebel.

From the evidence of Cimmie's 1927 letter there was a danger even then of Tom's becoming disillusioned with Labour: neither the puritans nor the moderates seemed to be much interested in getting things done. The former declaimed passionately about theory without much interest in what was possible: the latter, with their eye on the possible, held to no theory to spur them on. Tom did what he could from his position of not being quite in step with anyone to suggest what might be done.

In 1927 he was made a member of a sub-committee of the Labour Party National Executive to prepare a draft programme for the general election which would come at the latest in 1929. He wrote a personal letter to Ramsay MacDonald in which he expanded on the Birmingham Proposals of two years earlier; in particular he advocated the setting-up of an Economic Council with far-reaching powers to interfere in the economy. MacDonald was sympathetic to some of the ideas about ways in which credit might be provided to stimulate employment: what he objected to (and what most of Tom's critics must have objected to although for the reasons suggested it seemed they could not say this) were the methods that Tom proposed were necessary if the policy was to be put into effect. Tom claimed that there had to be dynamism with authority from the top: MacDonald wrote in his diary 'quiet cautious leadership is what I think is wanted'. But it was under just such cautious leadership that the economy had for years been failing.

The Labour Party programme that was prepared for the 1929 election under the title of *Labour and the Nation* was in fact largely written by MacDonald; it was a compendium of pious hopes that socialism would benefit all sections of the community without much mention of how this miracle might occur. But it served the Labour Party well at the time of the election.

The reason why the men whom the Labour Party and indeed the

country trusted found themselves more and more tending to ignore Tom seems to have been not just that his proposals for political action alarmed them, but also because there was something in his personal style that they felt might justify this alarm. It was about this area that it was difficult to talk – it was the political tradition that politics should be talked about in terms of politics, and questions of what human beings were should be kept to another context. But Tom as a person was such an obvious oddity on the political scene that personal pronouncements by political commentators kept on mysteriously breaking in: there had been Beatrice Webb's view of Tom – that 'with such perfection there must be some rottenness somewhere'. Ellen Wilkinson wrote 'The trouble with Oswald Mosley is that he is too good looking ... he is not that kind of nice hero who rescues the girl at the point of torture but the one who hisses "at last we meet!" ' The suggestion seemed to be that, with so many talents, the temptation to be out for oneself must be overwhelming. But there were many confusions here: what might have been a serious point about an ambivalence in Tom's moral attitudes became lost in what seemed to be fear or envy of his energy and even his sexual drives. There might have been serious points to be made about these too: but not in the traditional context of judging who was to be listened to on the National Executive.

During the summer of 1928 Tom and Cimmie were visited by her sister Irene at Denham and in the South of France. There was an evening at Savehay Farm in May when, having listened on the wireless to Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, Cimmie 'gave us a long socialist dissertation and was so earnest and heart-whole one could not argue with her'. Then a weekend or two later Cecil Beaton and Stephen Tennant came down: they dressed up in Mary Curzon's old clothes and – 'did the most fantastic dances as passed description for effeteness tho' brilliance was in every line'. Tom seems to have been a bit aloof from all this. Cimmie, Irene reported, 'seemed on the edge of a breakdown'. Then in August at Antibes there was a hugely successful birthday party for Cimmie to which there came 'the whole world and his wife': a few days later – 'I talked for the first time in my life for 2 hours to Cim over the misery of her present life and Tom's insulting behaviour to her: it killed me to hear of her rending loyalty to him saying he had never been unfaithful she only wished he would not make a fool of her in public.' Cimmie herself however seems to have been a ringleader in the party-going activity: certainly she never seems to have tried to get Tom away from the areas in which he could so easily hurt her.

It was Cimmie's very devotion to Tom, probably, that allowed him

to feel free and confident in this world: people from time to time encouraged Cimmie herself to flirt; even to take lovers: she used to say she did not want to. No one advised her to get out. On the evidence of her own letters there was something self-destructive, almost provocative, about her obsession with Tom; she would say this herself – that her possessiveness was making her nagging and sending her 'mad' without reference to whether Tom was going after anyone else or not. So, by behaving as he did, what had Tom got to lose? And by his endearments it seemed he could always mollify her. And at this time Cimmie did probably believe that Tom's flirtations could for the most part be explained in terms of the social game which was to do not with love but conquest; that apart from doing what was natural to him, what Tom was looking for was prestige. And she could try to convince herself that it was not unreasonable to want prestige.

Tom tried to justify his behaviour on the grounds that it was to do with 'wholeness', with health, with a necessary refusal to deny what was his nature: such behaviour balanced, and gave him energy for, the rigours of his life in politics. But in fact he seemed quite often to be ill. Cimmie wrote that she wished they could settle down for a time and live like ordinary people: but she did not arrange a time, even a holiday, in which this might be possible. She herself could not pretend that she flourished at the social game: but she, as much as he, seemed trapped by it.

A pattern was emerging of Tom as the swashbuckling, vituperative rebel in public life who in private life became also something of a naughty boy; who, having shown off, could return to its mother for forgiveness. (Tom's mother wrote to him at this time – 'It seems almost incredible to me to realise "The Honourable Gentleman" is my very beloved fat *obstinate* baby of so little while ago, and yet you haven't changed much.') Cimmie was now becoming seen as the angelic martyr mother: but she knew that there was something daemonic in her own attitudes to Tom: she both wanted and did not want him to be as he was: she saw him as both saint and devil. She did not, from the evidence of her letters, seem to be all that much interested now in his day-to-day politics: what he liked to do was to bring her news of them and she liked accepting this: it was as if he were saying to her – Look, what a good boy am I! People who want to be heroes perhaps also have to be somewhat like children: Freud said that anyone who has been the undisputed favourite of his mother keeps for life the feelings of a conqueror. With Tom there had been pushed out the image of the father – which inculcates the faculty for being discriminatory; self-critical.

Thus the would-be hero has no recognition of the dark side of himself: he sees the devil only in others. In himself, he feels a power that can be used. And so he goes out to do battle with a make-believe confidence and with make-believe attitudes to the world: he cannot distinguish between reality and what is imposed by childhood patterns. In this he is cheered on by his mother – or by the mother-figure he has chosen and who accepts him. All Tom's baby-talk with Cimmie – the porkers, the mutts, the moo-moos – seem to have been tapping some childhood well; he needed perhaps to draw strength from this before going out to fight – with his words, his tongue – the terrible dragons. But heroes continue not to see the dragons that are in themselves.

> My own beloved moonbeam one
>
> Adored his weekend so with all his blessed fellows – big, tiny and very tiny [drawing of three trees]. Hated going back so to this turmoil.
>
> Last night a thrilling discussion, but not for paper!
>
> All love in world my own socialist one. Tom

Tom went on a speaking tour of the country as a run-up to the general election: Cimmie involved herself with her constituency at Stoke. They each wrote solicitously about their own and the other's health. Tom – 'Good meeting here but my voice going badly at the end – three meetings and long motor drives in a night – will return I hope to find his sweet sausage lying down.' Cimmie – 'Stayed in bed all day and only had 4 cups of milk and a compôte of apples ... You were quite right when you said things went wrong when I thought of myself – I will try not to!' They were both driving themselves hard. They must have felt this necessary, if they were to take on the world seeing themselves and others as heroes or demons.

At the end of 1928 – in reply to a letter from Cimmie reiterating her sorrow at not always being able to live up to the high hopes she had for both of them and pleading for further 'special efforts' – Tom wrote:

> My own darling Moo-moo,
>
> Yes let us be happy when you come back – life and especially youth is so short. In our life it is so difficult to preserve the steel that withstands great strain with the sweet gentle things that make life happy – so hard to meet an age of turmoil and yet to be fit inhabitants of the world we wish to create. Yet to excel in the fulness of life the great incompatibles must be combined. Let us make together that

great attempt on which so far all have failed – the attempt to reconcile the epic life with gentle sensitive things. I would inscribe my name on the page of my epoch in letters of flame and of rose – success would be the first shadow of the superman on earth – it will probably fail, but better the empyrean flight and disaster than earthbound crawlings – let us live always with the epic sense. Tom.

But even Tom could not quite let things rest on such a note of hyperbole, and added:

This really means he thinks her the only one in the world for him – is sorry he has been a bit overwrought lately and is feeling a bit up in the air tonight – loves her so very much and does so passionately want her to be happy – sorry he is such a difficult one – she is a bit diff too sometimes but that is his fault for putting her in such a dogfight. Don't mind any *little* things my sweet one – though he will try and be better.

But it was the little things to which they were vulnerable – those dwarves that come up from the underworld and penetrate heroes' armour. In May 1929, just before the general election, Irene was at Denham with her eye again ready to perceive chinks in armour –

A most tragic and painful row took place between Cim and Tom at dinner over the cars for the election and he was vilely rude to her and I tried to argue to both long into the night but they both seem to be at deadlock. I wish at times he could disappear off the face of the earth as he only brings her endless agony. And to make it worse, she thought of all things she was in for a baby.

Cimmie was in fact pregnant. Irene went to help her in her campaign at Stoke. The election there had aroused enormous interest because Cimmie as a rich socialist had drawn on herself all the publicity and abuse that Tom usually attracted, and there was the added appeal of her being a good-looking woman. The old stories about wealth and duplicity were trotted out: Cimmie was supposed to have a penniless brother in America whom the heartless family allowed to live in a workhouse: Tom and Cimmie ran factories where they paid their workers eighteen shillings a week. Irene heard a woman telling such stories on a bus, and remonstrated: the woman called Irene 'a bit of scum'. At a meeting of Cimmie's conservative opponent, Colonel Ward, a group of Cimmie's

supporters challenged him about the spreading of such stories: in the resulting confusion Irene:

> had to yell that I was her sister and knew more about the Leiter fortunes than Colonel Ward and my grandfather did not corner wheat. The chairwoman yelled for the police. Ward was white as a sheet. I left the room taking ¾ of the clapping and shrieking women with me and I was cheered all the way down the streets.

Irene and her band of maenads in fact so alarmed Colonel Ward that he announced that as a result of 'organised hooliganism' he had decided to cancel his further meetings on the grounds that 'the socialists have determined to put an end to free speech in this country'.

At her eve-of-poll meeting Cimmie herself received:

> the wildest reception ... We went on to Fenton Town Hall Square where she had another thundering welcome save for a small group of hysterical booers one of whom, a woman, tried to tear everything off Cim. To get away we had to have barriers of strong young men to prevent us from being torn to shreds by the yelling crowd.

Cimmie got a 7,850 majority over Colonel Ward – his majority at the last election had been 4,500. She doubled the Labour vote from 13,000 to 26,000: she recorded one of the biggest swings to Labour in the country. Later that day she was again 'nearly torn to ribbons' when she met Ramsay MacDonald in London: she was rescued 'shaking with emotion'. Four days later, on June 6th, she had a miscarriage.

At his own eve-of-poll meeting at Smethwick Tom had joked with his audience – 'I have got the wind up. I am afraid my wife will get a bigger majority than me.' She did. Tom's majority was 7,340.

After Cimmie had had her miscarriage Irene reported – 'Poor old Tom was pretty hard hit.' But Irene herself seems to have caught something of the fever of heroic politics. With Cimmie and Tom both now in Parliament and with Tom obviously set to enjoy his first taste of practical, ministerial power, she wrote to Cimmie:

> I don't want you to think it was all the election, because I think Bonny found your inside unsatisfactory and you might have had a real tragedy later whereas now if you rest peacefully for 10 days or more and let it get pitched right again then you stand a far better chance of having a real strong baby and being yourself strong too to carry

it. I don't want you to feel the bitterness of this too much, my very dear one. Great things have come to you and Tom in parliament things – this is indeed a heartbreak in the midst of it – but have faith it was for the best.

CHAPTER 13

Rules of the Game: Ministerial Office

In the General Election of May 1929 Labour won 287 seats, the Conservatives 261, and the Liberals 59. Ramsay MacDonald formed a Labour Government with Liberal backing. The rumours that Tom might be made Foreign Secretary did not materialise. There were too many party stalwarts who had to be satisfied; and in any case Tom's reputation, both political and personal, was probably thought not yet to be sufficiently secure. He was made Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with special responsibility for unemployment – a ministerial post outside the cabinet. His boss within the cabinet was J. H. Thomas, the Lord Privy Seal, ex-secretary of the railwaymen's union.

Tom entered his one year of ministerial power with an enormous task placed somewhat nebulously above his shoulders but with no effective administrative apparatus by which to handle it. He was given a room in the Treasury, and as his private secretary a Treasury official who had been an assistant to Keynes: he personally employed Allan Young, his agent from Birmingham, as his political secretary. But even in government he seemed fated to be very much a lone voice. Winston Churchill described him as being 'a sort of ginger assistant to the Lord Privy Seal; and more ginger than assistant I have no doubt'.

J. H. Thomas was a flamboyant character, a 'card', the inspirer of innumerable comic stories. When he arrived in his minister's office in 1929 he was said to have remarked 'What a bloody awful 'ole more privy than seal.' Lord Birkenhead found him with a hangover one morning complaining 'I've an 'ell of an 'ead': Lord Birkenhead said 'Why not take a couple of aspirates.' Once at a railwaymen's meeting a heckler called out 'Jimmy you're selling us!' and Thomas replied 'I'm trying but I can't find a buyer!' Tom remarked in his autobiography that it was difficult personally to dislike a man who could make a remark

like that. But it was also difficult to work at the huge and largely uncharted problem of unemployment with someone whose talents, however endearing, had been for negotiating, bargaining, disarming people, making them laugh. He had never shown much interest in transforming society.

The other members of the government put on to deal with unemployment were George Lansbury, First Commissioner of Works, a 70-year old party stalwart with (in Beatrice Webb's words) 'certainly no capacity for solving intellectual problems'; and Tom Johnston, Under Secretary of State for Scotland, a man of intelligence but carrying little weight. These four – Thomas, Mosley, Lansbury and Johnston – were supposed to work together; but there was no timetable nor structure by which they regularly met, and they had no control over machinery for implementing their decisions if they did. After some months, Tom Johnston wrote that he was uncertain even whether or not he was in fact on the 'Unemployment Committee'. The only discernible difference in administrative machinery from that used by the previous government was that whereas before responsibility for providing both work and benefits for the unemployed had resided with the Ministry of Labour, now the responsibility for providing work had been taken away and given to J. H. Thomas and his staff in the Treasury – consisting of four civil servants seconded from the Inland Revenue, the Board of Trade, and the War Office – and the responsibility for implementing any recommendations remained invested with the Board of Trade. So that what in words had seemed to be a step in the direction of setting up an economic supreme council with executive powers such as Tom had always advocated, in fact turned out to be a bureaucratic proliferation of functions which made effective action more difficult than ever.

This perhaps in some ways suited J. H. Thomas. His biographer wrote of him that at this time 'the projects that seethed in his mind ranged from a bridge over the Zambesi river to a traffic circus at the Elephant and Castle: he saw civil servants, businessmen, local government authorities, trades unionists, engineers, scientists, post office officials, railway directors'. He was the chairman of an unending succession of committees, thrashing out the feasibility of railway schemes, harbour schemes, road schemes; for drainage, forestry, electricity and slum-clearance. But after all the talk, nothing much happened. Nothing much in fact could happen unless the government provided money; and J. H. Thomas and the other members of the Cabinet knew that it was unlikely that money would be forthcoming. Thomas agreed with

Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that above all there should be no departure from strict free-trade principles: no subsidies to industry; no danger of inflation. But then, what on earth did a government think it could do about unemployment if it had no money with which to employ people? All the talk, all the committees, began to seem as if they were just noises to cover up the silences of nothing being done; while the government waited helplessly for world trade to pick up on its own.

Tom for a time tried to work loyally with Thomas. Just before his first speech in Parliament for the government front bench on 4th July Thomas told him to announce that between 75 and 100 million pounds would be spent on the electrification of Liverpool Street Station. Tom announced these figures: later in the debate Thomas reassured members anxious about the fact that money might at last be poured out that of course his colleague must have been referring to 'the total amount of all possible electrification schemes under consideration'. Tom wrote later – 'It was the only time in my life I ever gave to the House of Commons a fact or a figure which was not valid.' To Thomas, all this was part of the game of making noises that might reassure people in one way, knowing that noises could be taken back and used to reassure people in another.

Tom liked to tell a story of how he was going in to a committee room with Thomas one day and he noticed how Thomas was holding an object under his coat-tails. The committee was on the subject of Post Office expenditure; in particular on the cost of a new box for telephones that was to be put on the walls of houses. Thomas had been told by his civil servants that the wooden box they recommended would cost fifteen shillings: in the committee, Thomas produced from beneath his coat with a flourish a tin box and announced – 'Four bob!' The civil servants explained that the wooden box itself cost three shillings: it was what was inside it that cost the other twelve.

During July Tom did manage to pilot through the House of Commons a Colonial Development Bill which contained provisions about safeguarding native labour. A newspaper commented – 'His name will live as the minister responsible for the first Act laying down important principles to protect native labour from exploitation.'

He also – working in his 'semi-dungeon high up in the Treasury' (Lansbury's phrase) – produced his own plan for creating vacancies for young people in industry by offering those over sixty-five better pensions if they retired – increasing the payment to married couples from 10s to 30s a week. The Treasury said that the cost of this was

prohibitive. Tom then suggested that pensions could be offered to those employed in certain depressed industries – coal mining, iron and steel, ship building. While the Treasury was working out ways in which to discourage this, Tom went off on his summer holidays.

Just before he left, at the Durham miner's Gala at the end of July, he declared – 'I would rather see the Labour Government go down in defeat than shrink from great issues, because from such defeats men rise again with strength redoubled.'

During August 1929 – two months after the Labour Government had taken office with their urgent and primary commitment that of dealing with unemployment – all the four responsible ministers were out of England. Thomas was in Canada, Lansbury and Johnston were on holiday in Scotland. Tom's life in the South of France will be described in the next chapter.

During the summer of 1929 the unemployment figure was just over a million: it had been much the same for six years. Unemployment was held to be a great evil both because it was not seen how the dole could reasonably be raised above a level of barest subsistence, and because wasted potential productivity seemed to be an affront to accepted ideas about progress. On his return from holiday Tom returned to the attack about pensions: 'a man of sixty who has worked all his life will not suffer much demoralisation from living in idleness but a man of 20 may suffer irreparable harm'. He worked out his scheme in even greater detail: all insured workers who reached the age of sixty by a certain date were to be offered a pension of £1 a week for a single man and 30s a week for a married man on condition that they retired from work within six months: the cost of the scheme could be spread over fifteen years. By this, Tom estimated, 'at one stroke we reduce by one third the wholly unemployed'. The scheme was put to the cabinet: the cabinet appointed a sub-committee: the Treasury told the sub-committee that the cost (£22 million) was still prohibitive because they were traditionally committed to annual budgeting and could not think in terms of fifteen years. They put up the further argument – how could it be proved, until it happened, that the young would in such a scheme be absorbed into industry? Tom replied – How could anything, in fact, be proved until it happened? The Treasury's argument was for never doing anything.

Tom started a new line of attack by proposing a national programme for building roads. At the moment there were less than 4,000 men throughout the country employed in road-building: the business was entirely in the hands of local authorities. Tom planned an additional national scheme in which high wages would be offered to those in areas

of the worst unemployment to build trunk roads and motorways. This scheme was received with ridicule. Did Tom not see, his critics said, that local governments would simply shelve their own schemes in the hope that the Labour Government would take over their costs? And how would a national organisation fare any better in the lengthy business of going through the formalities of acquiring land and so on than local authorities were already faring? And in any case, how could it be proved, again, that the building of roads would be of long-term assistance to the national economy? But above all – would not providing money for roads involve withdrawing money which might have been used by industries engaged in the export trade: and the encouragement of this, in the Treasury's view, was still the only hope of the country's recovery.

To this Tom replied that it had been the blind faith in the export trade that had led the country to its present moribund predicament: with every country giving priority to exports in a free-trade world, only those would get along which produced the cheapest goods by paying the lowest wages. In fact the Treasury itself had very little to suggest as a cure for unemployment except a reduction in wages – but then other countries could reduce wages more. Tom referred back to his Birmingham proposals of 1925 in which he had advocated that a closed economic area should be created in which a strong central government should have control over investment in industry, the buying of raw materials, and the manipulation of wages and prices. In the face of questions about how a central organisation would effectively control myriad local interests and organisations Tom simply asserted that of course if it was to be effective it would have to be given powers to do just this: that if it was not, then of course this implied that effective action was not wanted. But it was in the face of this sort of argument of Tom's that people found it easiest not to answer him at all: there was no accepted political language by which it might be stated that in certain circumstances, in the face of the danger of greater evils, it might be better perhaps even in such a grave area as that of unemployment if in fact things only got talked about and not much was done.

In the middle of all this argument, or silence, there was the Wall Street crash of October 1929 when the bottom as it were, seemed to fall out of capitalists' lives in skyscrapers. Tom's prophecies seemed to be being fulfilled – there was indeed something suicidal about a world in which it was imagined that progress could be maintained by everyone competing against others to produce ever cheaper goods. J. H. Thomas had returned from Canada where ostensibly he had been to try to stimulate

trade: it became evident that he had stimulated little but an anxiety about himself. By December he was reported by Beatrice Webb to be 'completely rattled and in such a state of panic that he is bordering on lunacy: Henderson reported that the PM feared suicidal mania'. Arthur Henderson suggested that Thomas 'must be sent away for a rest and Oswald Mosley installed under the Council to carry out agreed plans'. But the trouble was there were no agreed plans; and within the existing organisation there was no hope of carrying them out even if there were.

Tom had been on a speaking tour of the country trying to get support for his own plans: 'Every citizen should enrol himself in the great national army that is fighting unemployment.' But what, apart from building roads, was this army actually to do? Tom poured out schemes that were sometimes as bizarre as J. H. Thomas's: he admitted they were 'some hopeful, and some a little fantastic'. He wrote to the Air Minister suggesting – what about a roof over Victoria Station, to make a mid-city aerodrome?

MacDonald himself had for most of this time been occupied with Foreign Affairs: he had been in America successfully discussing naval disarmament. For the first six months of the Labour government he remained popular: he was the sort of Prime Minister that people liked: he was handsome, had a fine speaking voice, and he uttered noises of reassurance. In December 1929 he and Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were made freemen of the City of London: Beatrice Webb reported that during his speech to the assembled financiers at the banquet at the Mansion House 'his handsome features literally glowed ... which enhanced his beauty – just as a young girl's beauty glows under the ardent eyes of her lover'. In contrast, there sat 'Jimmy Thomas in the front row gazing at the ceremony, his ugly and rather mean face made meaner and uglier by an altogether exaggerated sense of personal failure'.

It seemed that Thomas was to be the scapegoat for the government's failure to deal with unemployment. But no government since the war had managed to deal with unemployment; and Tom, whatever he felt about Thomas, was not interested in questions of who was to be scapegoat. He went to see MacDonald in December and told him that he, Tom, was preparing a memorandum in which there would be put together all his proposals during the last six months. He would then ask MacDonald to put this before the Cabinet.

MacDonald went to his home at Lossiemouth, in Scotland, for the Christmas holidays. From there on December 30th he wrote in his own handwriting a letter to Tom.

My dear Mosley,

I had no chance of renewing our conversation about unemployment but I have thought much of what you said. Indeed for months I have been concerned with the state of things.

1 I am troubled about the lack of cooperation amongst the Junta to which the problem has been handed over. I was hoping that you would have all pulled together and hammered out from your diversity of view some agreed policy. I must admit the facts. That has not happened, and into whys and wherefores the crowded state of my own work has prevented me from going. I thought I could safely leave it to you all and took on things which I should not have done had I thought that you would not have all pulled together ...

2 The Economic Advisory Committee will be set up soon but there are various things to be provided for which at the last minute have caused delay. I am dealing with them here. That would be helpful but of course its fruits would not ripen in a month.

3 I am disturbed that the main features of our work hitherto has been to give further allowances for distress ... On outsiders it is having a depressing effect and is certainly lowering production. I have seen a good many old supporters and have had rather voluminous letters from others. The general tone is one of warning against those who are sponging and clamouring.

4 I have been looking into the pensions at 60 to relieve the labour market and I am quite certain it will not do that to any appreciable extent ... When one thinks this idea down to its essence, it is that we are overpopulated: that that old ruffian Malthus is right. The condition of the derelict areas is of the same class of problem. The whole thing must really be tackled in a way other than money aids ...

5 As I see the problem (dimly) we must hang on to what we are doing but weed out the spongers all round ... At the same time we should tackle the problem systematically. For instance the Department should present to the Treasury its views upon the financial and taxation policy – the Economic Advisory will soon do this I hope – for a situation has to be handled and not merely theories applied. We ought also to have really sound information as to expenditure upon unemployment, if for no other reason than to assure ourselves and enable us to defend ourselves against the attack which will soon be launched upon us.

But I must stop. My guardians here demand my presence for a walk. Only now am I feeling the work of past months in consequence

of which I can tell C [Cimmie] a most bloodcurdling adventure in dreamland – a real good horror.

Unto you both much affection.

Yrs. JRM

Tom was already preparing his memorandum. He worked on it through the Christmas holidays: he showed a draft to Keynes in the middle of January. Keynes remarked that it was 'a very able document and illuminating'. Tom sent a copy to MacDonald on 23rd January.

What became known as the Mosley Memorandum is a 15-page document in which Tom reiterated his proposals of the previous four years and put them into a form which, if the Cabinet still ignored them, he could use to appeal over the Cabinet's head first to the Parliamentary Labour Party and then to the country. The style of the memorandum is conciliatory and even tentative: it is emphasised that the aim is not to suggest clear-cut answers, but to set out unavoidably the serious questions which had to be discussed with a view to finding answers.

The second and third sections of the memorandum deal with long-term and short-term plans for providing work. It is pointed out that there is a certain conflict of interest here: long-term plans rely on the rationalisation of industry – on the bringing of industry up to date in both matters of technology and uses of manpower – and this may actually increase short-term unemployment. Thus it is all the more necessary that short-term employment should be treated as an urgent and separate issue.

To deal with short-term employment the memorandum concentrates on road construction. There are proposals concerning the technicalities by which movement and employment of labour should be handled sensibly by cooperation between national and local authorities. The whole short term scheme could be financed by 'a loan based upon the revenue from the Road Fund'. The cost to the taxpayer should be little more than the equivalent of 'a sixpenny tax on unearned income'. Such moderate expenditure, Tom suggested, would hardly cause such inflation as would involve a 'flight from the pound'. Then, discussion on long-term plans could begin.

But the success of the whole scheme depended on the proper working of the administrative machinery by which it would be operated: and it was just this area – that dealt with by the first and by far the most important section of the memorandum – that Tom's critics found it difficult not just not to reject, but even to talk about.

It was suggested that at the head of the Executive Committee to be

set up should be the Prime Minister himself and under him, as if in a war-time inner Cabinet, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and five or six other ministers of relevant departments. Under this Executive Committee, which would meet once a week, there would be standing committees to implement its decisions headed by the relevant ministers. As part of a permanent executive machinery there would be a secretariat of twelve top civil servants who would also provide the information for the committees on which they themselves would serve. There would also be a research committee of economists and an advisory committee of financiers and businessmen to work with the committees of politicians. Finally, there would be attached to this apparatus an Industrial Bank, which would provide credit for the rationalisation schemes, higher wages and industrial development, as ordered by the Executive Committee or the Standing Committees. The aim of the whole was, simply, that authoritative action should be made possible. 'An attack upon the economic problem can only be effective under the auspices of the Prime Minister himself who should be armed with an adequate staff for such a purpose. He alone possesses the power to secure coordination and the authority to enforce action when decisions are taken.'

But it was just this suggestion that produced the silence amongst Tom's critics. Everyone in government circles knew that the organisation under J. H. Thomas was not working: Thomas himself was breaking down: his lieutenants on their own were powerless: even what committees there were were seldom meeting. And unemployment was growing. But it seemed to be the case that in this situation most people in positions of authority continued to think that they should make noises of lamentation – and do little else. Their fear, of course, was that if Tom's proposals were put into effect, there would be danger of some sort of dictatorship – with its attendant corruptions. But if such methods seemed to be the only way to cure unemployment, how could they say they were not interested? It was the tradition that politicians were supposed to say they wanted to get things done.

Tom sent his memorandum to Ramsay MacDonald on January 23rd 1930. Shortly before this, he had mentioned to J. H. Thomas that he was formulating some opinions about unemployment which he would like Thomas to see in due course. Ramsay MacDonald telephoned to Thomas early in February to ask if he knew of the Memorandum. Thomas said he did not. Then there ensued the sort of game by which politicians effectively evade talking about things that matter, by getting in a state about things that do not.

Thomas wrote to MacDonald complaining that Tom had improperly

gone over his, Thomas's, head; and so he, with much regret, had no alternative but to offer MacDonald his resignation. MacDonald wrote to Thomas saying that he quite understood his, Thomas's, hurt feelings; but he had no alternative but to refuse his resignation out of considerations of national interest ('we must endure however hard the road may be'). MacDonald also wrote to Tom saying how very surprised he, MacDonald, was about Tom's behaviour which had been quite properly resented by his boss, Thomas ('I need not explain why that should be so'). But the best thing of course, all round, MacDonald suggested, would be to patch the whole matter up and say no more about it. In the middle of all this John Strachey, who was now Tom's Parliamentary Private Secretary, left a copy of the Memorandum lying around in his house when journalists were present and its contexts were 'leaked' to the press – whether by design or accident, of course, people could hint darkly. This gave Thomas further opportunities to demonstrate hurt feelings. With all this posturing going on the memorandum itself could be, and quietly was, put on the shelf – to be considered in due course by a Cabinet sub-committee consisting of Snowden, Greenwood, Margaret Bondfield, and Tom Shaw – who were all known to be hostile to Tom's ideas. This committee then could, and did, push it even further to the back of the shelf by sending it to the Treasury for a thorough examination. There it would lie, as if in some morgue.

In all the business about the Mosley memorandum – concerning both the contents and the reactions of people to it – there was a confusion, barely conscious, not just about the nature of the political game, but about the nature of language and even about human nature itself. Tom had been brought up outside a political tradition: he believed that, politically, words should mean roughly what they said. He had become a socialist because he thought it vital, amongst other things, that the unemployment problem should be solved: that the socialists, when they got power, should try to fulfil their election pledges and give priority to doing this. But then, when they achieved power largely through holding out hopes by their promises, they seemed to be doing nothing serious about the problem at all. Tom was outraged by this. He thought – If you say you want to solve the unemployment problem then you set up machinery by which the unemployment problem can be solved; if you do not, then this means that you do not want to solve the unemployment problem. You should then admit this: any other attitude is cheating.

Those who had been in the Labour Party or indeed in any political tradition for a long time knew that in some sense all this had to be a

game: you had good intentions: you honestly professed them in your manifestos: you hoped by this to get power: none of this was cheating. But when you did get power of course there were often realities which were stronger than the good intentions you had had: you were forced to adapt yourself to realities not because you were betraying your good intentions, but because if you did not you might be betraying other good principles more severely. There was often a choice of evils: you had sometimes, possibly, to do almost nothing. But you could not quite say this. Political language had to be about will, and dynamism, or there would never be hope of improvement.

At the back of this there was a question of how one might see human nature. Tom thought, or believed (or wanted to believe: the words are difficult) that human beings are rational: that if human beings are rational then words should properly mean roughly what they say. There seemed to him no sense in the idea that sometimes a game with words might properly by played in which the point was that they are not quite believed: but such words are none the less valid because this non-belief is recognised by the participants from a higher point of view. In certain areas human beings play games because the demands on them are too paradoxical to make sense if they do not: in the area for instance to do with the necessary exercise of power and the salutary limitation of power it is not in the simplicities of words that there is truth; but in the recognition that there is something that can be honoured beyond words' limitations.

Tom's critics in the Party, however much they said they believed in the rational processes of socialism, yet believed in their bones, most of them (they had been brought up with less opportunities for self-deception than Tom) that human affairs were for the most part irrational and there had to be safeguards against the dangerously over-rationalising tendencies of human beings and of words. When Tom made his proposals for strong central governmental machinery they could not attack him directly because, as socialists, this is what they had always been advocating; how else could they have got as far as they had with evolutionary or revolutionary change? But it was by instinct that they feared the exaggerated implementation of government control: there is nothing more irrational, they knew, than human beings who have been given total power – even to act in such a way as they think is wholly rational. But still, they could not quite say this, or how would they ask for, or be given, any power at all? Both they, and the people who voted for them, had to pretend they could be trusted with power: and it was still in fact by dealing in limited power that people could strive and hope

bit by bit for reasonable change. But all this only made sense if it was held together by rules of an instinctively accepted political game – rules that were known, but not stated, on a supra-rational level. So what did such people do when someone came along with rational arguments that did not take into account styles or levels of understanding – who did not see from some metaphysical level what had to be, and what was not, a game? It was safest, presumably, to ignore such a person, if he could not properly be spoken to. One of the rules of the game was that you could not exactly explain what was and what was not a game: if you did, then the someone who did not accept that there was a game could simply make you seem a hypocrite.

Tom might have understood some of the complexities of games-playing if he had pondered more about himself. Of course, he himself played games: his letters to Cimmie were genuine games: how better could he write to her? It was on his perceiving something like this that there might have been truth. He seemed to have to insist that other people were not playing games: it is difficult to imagine how, in his private life, he succeeded in thinking this of himself.

CHAPTER 14

Entertainment

Cimmie had her miscarriage early in June. She took her seat in the House of Commons at the end of the month. In August the family went for their usual summer holiday to Antibes.

Cimmie's sister Irene joined them there. She recorded in her cloudy, anarchic style what life in the South of France was like. Tom and Cimmie and the children were staying at the Eden Roc hotel. the other *dramatis personae* in Irene's account were in the hotel or in villas round about. The chief attraction of the long hot summer was the film star John Gilbert, who had recently been acting with Greta Garbo, and was with his wife Ina Claire. In supporting roles in Irene's story were – Baba and Fruity Metcalfe, Cimmie's younger sister and her husband; Bobby and Paula Casa Maury (the latter Tom was currently pursuing); John Strachey and his recently married wife Esther; Dick Wyndham, a painter and Cimmie's confidante; Babe Barnato, a racing motorist; Rupert Belville, a banker; and Americans Ben Finney and Dudley Malone. Irene had been enraged by overhearing Tom at a dinner party speculating in whispers to Paula Casa Maury about which of the three Curzon sisters would succeed in the contest to attract John Gilbert – 'the heavyweight, the lightweight or the middle' (Irene, Baba or Cimmie.) The evening had ended in uproar, with Tom accusing Cimmie of being drunk. The next day:

> Tom was so foul to Cim when she asked him about her birthday plans saying he did not care and was fed up with all of us I lost my temper and called him a cad. So we left him and went with the children to the beach. The weather was too vile for Ben Finney's party by boat to Monte Carlo so a lot of us joined up. Bowls and bowls of punch were made as we flopped about on mattresses in the drawing room

– Dick, Cim and I were sober adjuncts to a very stewed party. Ben suddenly brought in 'Miss America' who had won the world's beauty competition – utterly out of it and left crying in about an hour. It was discussed and discussed what we should do for hours till it resorted to more punch and sandwiches – and a marvellous dish of Ben's, chili and rice and meat. Ina was thoroughly drunk and gay and sweet Fruity was well over the odds with Baba very annoyed. He disappeared and made up like John Gilbert and came in with Gilbert and Cim and proceeded to circle all the ladies as the great lover and was very funny. The fun was entirely ruined at 10 pm by Maurice and Miss Stephenson both dead drunk being pressed together asleep and she gently fondling his hair and we all left the room in disgust and found bed the only solution. Tom emerged when we got back in haughty solitude having been away alone in a huff.

Went to the beach with the children. Cim came very late and I felt from her face and eyes Tom had been tiresome again. Poor Fruity was carried off having nearly cut his foot in 2 with glass from a bottle on the Cannes beach. Fearful arguments with Ben and everyone as to whether we should have his boat party. Ben Finney's dog did the most lovely dives for us and simply loved it.

August 23rd. Cim's birthday.
Gave Cim a black bag for the House of Commons. She got some lovely 'presies' and Tom came up to scratch with a lovely modern Metropolis Cocktail Set and Lamp. Had a family bathe with the children on the Roc, and a family lunch with the children and Baba. Joined up with Babe Barnato's big party at the next table ... tore across the ocean in Barnato's speed boat ... played vile tennis with Barnato and 2 tiresome men with 4 dirty tennis balls getting lost the whole time. Had a swim and gave Cim another bag, an exquisite one, before dinner. She gave the most perfect party down on the rocks: lovely lit tables all round, huge cinema lights making wonderful effects on everything, a marvellous band that did turns walking about and sitting out on the diving boards. Dudley Malone made a speech to Cim after a bad effort by Finney. Diving races went on with Babe Barnato, Rupert Belville and John Gilbert. I had Gilbert and Finney for dinner and had an absorbing talk with Gilbert on his view of women – *his* women – and he told me he was going off alone as things were screw-eyed with him and Ina. The whole trouble is he needs an alsatian dog like Ben's for a wife – absolute obedience. Went to the Beouf about 1.30. Tom deliberately took Ina to see Fruity and

left her there. Gilbert, losing her, went mad, tore back to the hotel thinking she was left behind, came back to find her dancing and savagely dragged her into the street where Cim and Dudley witnessed a fearful scene. A bit later Bobby found him walking into the sea and drove him round Cannes to steady him. Then he came back and Baba and Cim had hour after hour battling and appeasing Ina and him. It was the most fantastic evening I have ever witnessed. Dudley finally took Ina to his villa for the night and exhausted with waiting on other people's rows Knottman drove me home at 5 am. No one knew what happened to Gilbert. I saw him vanish down the road with Baba before I left. Rupert Belville had got very drunk at dinner and said filthy things about the rich socialists – about Esther and John and Cim and Tom – which Esther overheard, and she got up and left the table.

The next day Tom left by train for London – to get back to work on his plans for the unemployed. John Gilbert, it was discovered, had also left at dawn by taxi for Paris. He had told the driver – 'Don't have an accident: my face is my fortune.' Irene stayed on for a few more days with Cimmie and the children: she had a talk with Nanny about how they thought Cimmie was becoming 'awfully callous'. Cimmie wrote a letter to Tom – 'It has been incredibly quiet since you left ... John G returned late that night after getting to Lyons in his taxi before coming to ... Dick is getting well away with his countess, and has already had a flog.'

Cimmie returned to London. Tom was working in his semi-dungeon in the Treasury. They both made efforts that autumn to sort out their own problems – or at least to view them rationally. Tom was becoming more impatient and scathing with Cimmie publicly. Cimmie wrote for advice to Dick Wyndham, who had stayed on in the South of France to paint. He replied:

Darling Cimmie, Your letter did rather upset me, and I wish I could give you some advice that would make your life happier. There seems no solution because you have had the misfortune to have been born a naturally happy person. This sounds like a paradox, but it isn't. Nearly all intelligent people are born naturally miserable. I am sure that Tom is just as unhappy and probably more so than you. And if you take all our friends – for instance Sachie, Hutchy, William – if you could see their real thoughts, how dismally sad you would find them! their quite unexpected hopes, regrets, and longings. And even I, who am supposed to lead such an ideal life with my painting,

freedom and money, live, in reality, a life of acute misery, worry and loneliness relieved occasionally by moments of great exaltation; but these happen far too seldom to make life worth while. I suppose only the human sheep are able to lead a continuously happy life; they have their 'dope' – religion, the Empire, their hire-purchase furniture; other sheep to look down upon; their aspidistra; and finally a respectable funeral and a very white marble or speckled grey granite tombstone. They have no moments of exaltation: they don't want them. But your natural happiness refuses to admit such an unpleasant state of affairs. You feel that having been born in a world filled with so many beautiful things one should be allowed to enjoy it without hindrance and help others to enjoy it. How right you are! But just because you are filled with such capabilities of enjoyment you are constantly being disillusioned and hurt. You are still like a child who sees an infinite source of fun in every object around him only to find that they are all protected by those words – 'you mustn't touch'.

On reading through this rigmarole I find it hasn't got us very far. The only logical solution seems to be that you must damp your natural happiness in order to be immune from the misery of a miserable world; and that is a remedy I would hate to advise. It comes under the heading of innoculation of which I disapprove.

The only thing I can suggest is to make a list of the things that don't matter so much – such as the mastif,* and even an occasional flit to Paris: they are annoying, but no more so than an occasional attack of flu. Then make a list of all the things you do really mind about like hell. Make up your mind never to say a word about the less important things for fear that in time you might find yourself perpetually nagging. Not only don't mention them, don't think about them, *don't mind them*. About the things that matter make a real *definite stand* – raise hell, throw things, do and say anything you like. But you must make your two lists and stick to them.

You will probably say that it is just the mounting up of the relatively small things that is so unbearable – I know – but if you start by disregarding them they won't mount up, they will never have been born.

I shall be leaving here in a few days now, all my four paintings having come to a bad end; so we soon will be able to have a 'crack'.** I shall devote some of the time to extracting the name of the 'old friend' who has fallen in love with you ...

* *Tom had recently bought a large dog.*
** *talk.*

This letter was posted on October 20th 1929. On October 21st Tom posted his own long letter to Cimmie. He had come to Denham to rest. Cimmie was in her constituency.

Savehay Farm
Denham
Bucks

Meanderings of a sick mutt.

My darling fellow,

Lying in bed with this wretched cold I have thought so much of our relationship and my mind moves to these conclusions – write and tell me if you agree.

(1) The thing that matters most is our love and alliance in all things. That should be our absolutely fixed and unchanging relation – a basis of life in which we both have complete confidence – sure that never in any crisis or misfortune will it fail us.

(2) The next most important thing is the individual happiness and development of each of us – without that, many of the gifts and powers we have to give to the world must be damaged and reduced: without happiness and a sense of all-pervading freedom and power we cannot be complete people. Yet none but complete people can succeed in the stupendous task that we have set ourselves

Our problem is how to reconcile and to blend into a perfect life these 2 premises of our existence: (1) our marriage and alliance in all things (2) our individual happiness and freedom which are essentials of the full personality.

To achieve this we must put away all small things. We really deny ourselves (2) because our confidence in (1) is not enough.

Each of us is afraid that the small incidents of (2) may destroy (1): each of us consequently is inclined to snatch small bits of (2) for himself or herself while striving to thwart rather than to assist the other. That situation is a commonplace in the marriage of all remarkable people – it is small, contemptible and atavistic – in our case it should be entirely lacking because (1) is so much stronger than in almost any other example of which one can think. We have not only love, a great companionship, children, home, etc – we have also a tremendous alliance in public life which has bound us together against the whole squalor of things as they are in face of a storm of hatred and mean lying abuse which no other couple has ever had to face. That is a great alliance which should be far above every factor in the sphere of (2). Yet I believe it is really our unexpressed fear that (2)

will affect (1) that leads to trouble in sphere of (2). From my side such apprehension might perhaps reasonably be stronger as you are so much younger and less sophisticated in sphere (2) than me – I know I should not be affected by it – you might be – yet even here I might be more reasonable to you in sphere (2) if I did not feel that in past and even present you had there severely restricted me. Such a feeling of course must arise on both sides and has created a vicious circle.

The way out I feel is this – we should not only acquiesce in (2) for each of us – we should be as much partners there as we are in (1). We should have such confidence in the permanence and inviolability of (1) (our marriage and alliance in all great things) that we should not only be unafraid of (2) (personal freedom and happiness) affecting (1), but we should actively promote complete confidence in each of us developing in sphere (2) with the assistance of the other – we should have no feeling of fear and regret of any kind if one of us enjoyed things apart from the other – we should realise that the complete development of each individual contributed to the success and greatness of the whole alliance.

We must of course do all things in the light of our position and mission in the world – we must never disarm before the enemy – only before each other. That is what I mean by 'Tenue'.

We are in a sense conspirators together against things as they are and conspirators cannot take the enemy into their confidence. To lead what we believe to be a moral life in our immoral society some concealment and even subterfuge is necessary if we are to retain our power to change that society for the great end we seek. Together we can retain our greatest power in public life to change the miseries of present society to live a full and human life.

We already have a great comfort in (1). Let us also have a great comfort in (2).

Let us have such confidence in the permanence and the superiority of our marriage and love over everything else in life that we can be partners in promoting the freedom and happiness of each of us as well. I believe it is possible – it means an end of all small things – of all small jealousies and fears – it means the triumph of the modern mind. I believe we are capable of it. Let us try to have a great compact – a great alliance in all things. (This reads like a very muddled and badly delivered political speech but it means he loves her very much and wants both of them to be happy fellows).

It was perhaps a saving grace of Tom's that he could write a bracket such

as at the end of this letter – at moments he could laugh at himself even when he was being carried away by one of his more extreme flights of self-justifying rationalisation and rhetoric. But, between the rhetoric and the laughter there was not much sign of guilt. The same evening that he posted this letter he played one of his more extravagant practical jokes upon his sister-in-law Irene. She was giving a large after-dinner party in her house at which her guests included Lord Beaverbrook, Ivor Novello, Beatrice Lillie and Arthur Rubinstein. Then (Irene recorded) – 'Some brute (a joke we presumed) rang me up as from Scotland Yard and tried to infer some of my party were thieves and were wanted'. The voice instructed her to keep all her guests with their hands up facing the wall until further notice. Irene paid no attention. When later she discovered the joker was Tom, she refused to speak to him or Cimmie for a week.

Cimmie received Tom's long letter when she was in Stoke: she travelled down to London and handed her reply to Tom.

> Darling Darling Darling Darling. I am so glad you wrote that letter – I agree with every word of it and *will* try – all the things you said are true. Now taking your two premises – it always has been because I have never been quite sure of (1) that I have been tricky about (2). You started off with (2)s so very soon after marriage before I had ever got confidence either in myself or you while you were my *whole* horizon literally in every way. I have never been persuaded you really really appreciated me, you were always finding fault, and liking people so utterly different to me, it made me apprehensive and always on the defensive.
>
> I must say I do not agree that you should be more apprehensive of me than I of you. I have only been driven to my small successes in sheer self-defence. In fact till very recently I have had none – and that alongside of your varied assortment has been very bad for me. I always felt you had so much more success (not generally speaking, I know I am all right as a general success, but I mean a 'particular' success) and that gave me an inferiority complex. You don't know the agonies I have gone through time after time when you have got off with lovely ladies and I have been left; it has very often nearly driven me dippy. I am sure you will never realise how even a success with nonentities like Mario Pansa, Ridal or Rochefoucauld restores my confidence, and you take it away again by sneering at the 'quality' of my fellows. You see while we are about it I had better be quite frank: I have always felt that you won on the swings and

roundabouts; that if it came to complete freedom inside category (2) you would profit by it much more than me; you would have more successes greater fun – have your cake (i.e. Mum) and eat it!! While I, well, I would have no cake at all – no fun on swings or roundabouts. I think maybe I am wrong but you must remember nothing really matters one toss to me except you and the children. I am terribly frightened on my own, and a good deal bewildered.

My success with Gilbert and the Frenchies last week was balm and oil to my 'tortured spirit' but believe me does not go very far. I am sure my whole trouble is I am small enough to feel that under such arrangement you would get much more than me and that stops me risking it. You have it in your power to hurt me so dreadfully – you have hurt me so dreadfully –

If only my confidence in (1) could be assured but I so often feel we only stick together because of our public position and not because we really do love and value each other. Now if we could have a perfect (1) all else follows. I will try. But do you see my point: if only I had more confidence, less of an inferiority complex; and you the one person in the world who could help most always finding fault, always criticising, always belittling me, making it worse; any efforts I do make on my own mocked and derided.

I retaliate in the obvious silly way – it *is* a vicious circle as you say. How are we to get out of it: if you were kinder to me, more considerate, I know I would 'respond to treatment': but in order for me to be nicer to you you *must* be nicer to me: I am not capable of the martyr-like effort, it may be very small and petty but I am not going to make an effort alone.

Oh dear even writing those few lines I feel resentment rising in me, and that I must not allow. But I think even you will allow making a success of living with you is hellish difficult if one also strives to keep one's own individuality and end up. I do hope this won't appear as a very one-sided sort of letter as yours was *so* fair – forgive me if it is – I think this a very good moment to really have a grand try at (1) and (2) and let us become experts at avoiding all minor exasperations; they cause endless bother and with skill can be avoided.

Remember this, I do adore you, unless in a mood (generally engendered by you) when I could kill you. I would die for you. You and the children are always the only things that really matter. I am not a bad sort of person neither are you. We both want to be happy – well here's to it. And bless you my love. Be my sweet Tommy I

fell in love with. Help Mum to be the grandest sort of person she can be. Kisses and devotion. Timmy

This is not nearly a nice enough letter. I did *love* yours and do thank you for it and *am* glad you wrote it and do love you.

Is your cold better?

I hope so.

In this letter Cimmie seems to have faced truly something of the predicament she was in with Tom: Tom had more energy, a more daemonic quality than she: he had the power to use words apparently rationally to justify his drives and ambitions: he could claim his own freedom and feel safe in it, because he could make impossible her own. Cimmie was a good woman; she loved Tom; she felt she could not challenge the whole process of their lives without losing him; but then, she did not seem to want to challenge this for herself. When he hurt her, she cried out; she tried to answer him back in kind; she did not turn away from him. Tom did not see that part of his energy and his success might depend on his having someone who adored him and whom he could manipulate: whom he could, when his own supremacy was threatened, mock and deride; and then win back with his endearments. Tom tried to sort out his problems with Cimmie in terms of reason: he thought – as he did about politics – that human problems could and should be solved by the presentation of a case so rational that it was unanswerable. It is not clear how often he had glimpses into his manipulations: even his laughter was something of a protection: soon with Cimmie, as in politics, the grandiose words would take over again – the 'mission to the world': the 'stupendous task'. But how did he and Cimmie imagine that with their quarrelling, their baby-talk, they were achieving 'the triumph of the modern mind'? This mind was to be controlled by will: but how was there to be any reality of will if there were no observations of the nature of the self that was wielding it?

Cimmie's innocence (as Dick Wyndham had said) was to believe not in the efficacy of manipulation, as Tom did, but just that life could be made beautiful by efforts at honesty and truth. She believed this with regard to Tom: she believed it with regard to her politics. She had almost as little sense as Tom had of the irony of the contrasts between private and public life.

Soon after she got back from the summer holiday she made her maiden speech in the House of Commons. It was on the occasion of the second reading of the Widows', Orphans', and Old Age Contributory Pensions Bill, which aimed at providing pensions for the first time for

half a million widows. Cimmie said she welcomed the bill because it 'definitely takes us along the road towards the abolition of poverty and destitution': it was 'an approach towards the full acceptance of the fundamental truth that economic insecurity is socially created and should be provided for by the social services until it can be abolished by socialism'. To the opposition's suggestion that a working man or working woman might possibly be a better citizen if they were not too much looked after by the state she replied:

> I have noticed a word that has been greatly in use since this measure was brought in and that is the word 'demoralisation' – demoralisation of getting something for nothing. That is ground on which I am very much at home. All my life I have got something for nothing. Why? Have I earned it? Have I deserved it? Not a bit. I have just got it through luck. Of course some people might say I showed great intelligence in the choice of my parents, but I put it all down to luck. And not only I, but if I may be allowed to say so, a great many people on the opposite side of the House are in that same position – they also have always got something for nothing. Now the question is: are we demoralised? I could not answer that question for anyone but myself – but, looking at members opposite, may I be allowed to say they don't look too demoralised physically, though their mental and physical condition is beyond me to determine. I stoutly deny however that I am demoralised –

Cimmie got many congratulations for her speech – one from the Prime Minister ('excellent matter and excellent style'); one from Bob Boothby ('It was so good, my dear, that if I said all I want to you you wouldn't believe it'); one from an anonymous 'Mother of Ten' – 'You are splendid, you are magnificent ... those who as you say have all their lives had something for nothing cannot imagine what it is like to be all one's life giving all and getting nothing – their health and strength, their love and sacrifice, their leisure their pleasure, yes even life itself – that is the fate of the working class mother'.

Neither Cimmie nor Tom by instinct or by upbringing were equipped to do what in fact most people do whatever their idealism or protestations – which is to try their best in whatever areas are available to them, and about the rest not too much to worry. This was just what Tom and Cimmie objected to about people like J. H. Thomas and Ramsay MacDonald – who talked of stupendous tasks and then did nothing. Tom and Cimmie were too proud: they had had too many

expectations pinned on to them: they could not be satisfied, as so many Labour people seemed to be satisfied, by having simply 'arrived'. They had the curse – whether of a good or a bad angel – to want to alter the world.

Humdrum politicians have almost necessarily to feel that idealism is dangerous: they feel it upsetting their day-to-day plans. Their jobs in administration, it seems, are properly to do with preventing anything disastrous being done by idealists. Tom, an idealist, was correct in thinking that such people were out to thwart him. It was perhaps their tragedy, as well as his, that at this time some idealism was probably necessary if there was not to be a drift towards chaos or war. It was the curse of the humdrum politicians that they had no use for the talents of someone like Tom: it was the curse of Tom to treat what he saw as their lethargy only with contempt. Few people at the time seemed capable of seeing a pattern into which they themselves and others of a different temperament might fit if all this was observed as it were from a higher viewpoint. Tom, certainly, did not see how his energy might be effective if he submitted it to the restraints of its being for a while thwarted. Everyone was accustomed to think in terms of antagonism – in one sort of view, or characteristic, not embracing but cancelling out another.

In war Tom had had little experience of the terrible helplessness of people even with good intentions when in authority: he for the most part had been war's victim. But it is people who have had actual experience of responsibility for life and death who have often learned that there is little good that can be done except in ways of steadfastness, and hope, and painstaking bit-by-bit efforts. And it is those who rage against the fact that there are victims, who want to alter the world; and so are apt to make victims of the people round them.

CHAPTER 15

Resignation

On May 9th 1930 the Cabinet sub-committee headed by Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, recommended that the Mosley Memorandum be rejected. Their reasons were – the Prime Minister could not take on the added burden of direct responsibility for employment; the proposed Executive Committee would undermine the tradition of the individual responsibilities of ministers; the road-building scheme ignored the rights of individuals and local authorities; the memorandum as a whole paid no attention to the one programme for recovery that in the long run would work – the encouragement of exports. Whatever might be useful in the scheme would have to be done at the expense of other things that might be useful: so it was best to play safe, and carry on just hoping that world trade would get better. What the Labour Cabinet objected to in fact was that the Memorandum was too socialistic: the arguments they put up against it were those of conservatism. But these were the arguments which, as Tom and other socialists had pointed out before the election, were resulting in society's breakdown. It seemed that socialists did not want to govern: they wanted to continue in the role to which they had become accustomed – that of being in opposition to any exercise of power.

The Cabinet set up another committee to consider the report of the Snowden committee – and to confer with Tom, Lansbury and Johnston. Discussions went on for ten days. The point at issue now was mainly about how to initiate some sort of road-building scheme: did you just raise money and get on with the job (Tom): or did you do nothing about money till you had worked out detailed plans with local authorities, (J. H. Thomas and Herbert Morrison, the Minister of Transport) – and then wait for the Treasury almost certainly to say that there was no money anyway. Tom was accused of wanting to

'Russianise' the government: Herbert Morrison said that he spoke 'like a landlord addressing his peasantry'. The issue was becoming simply between someone who wanted to give priority to getting something done over the probable cost, and the others who did not.

On May 19th Tom and Cimmie dined with Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Tom said that he intended to resign his ministerial post: what he found impossible was not so much the disagreement, but the fact that under Ramsay MacDonald there was no desire for serious practical talk at all. Meetings between ministers, he said, were more comic than anything in Bernard Shaw's *The Apple Cart*. Beatrice Webb noted that the Mosleys seemed 'sincere and assiduous in their public aims'.

Tom felt, correctly, that during the year he had been in office his energies had been used as a safety valve but there had never been a serious intention to get anything he recommended done. He had been quite cynically put in a position where his energy could be expended and his ideas ignored. He either had to resign, or to resign himself to the sort of game that during all his years in Parliament he had abominated.

On May 18th Bob Boothby, a conservative, had written to him:

My dear Tom,

From France I have been contemplating the state of politics with a jaundiced but more or less unbiased mind: and I beg of you not to resign. I cannot see that you would achieve anything: and you might well do yourself irreparable damage. It is a God's mercy that the existence of your memorandum is known to the public.

That was essential; but for the moment it is surely enough. I care about your political future far more than about any other single factor in public affairs, because I know that you are the ONLY one of my generation – of the post-war school of thought – who is capable of translating into action any of the ideas in which I genuinely believe. Consequently I can conceive of no greater tragedy than that you should take a step which might wreck your chances, or at any rate postpone the opportunity of carrying through constructive work.

If you stay where you are that opportunity is bound to come soon. Go, and where are you?

The example of Randolph Churchill is significant and appalling. You deliver yourself into the hands of every enemy, and they are not a few. Your own front bench will heave a sigh of relief, consign you to the Mountain, and take no more risks.

They will point to their own life-long services in the Labour cause, and contrast them with yours. They will regret that they are ap-

parently unable to proceed at a pace sufficient to satisfy the desires and ambitions of a wealthy young 'aristocrat' in a hurry.

Picture the parliamentary scene. You will make your case against the government – a formidable one – but nine-tenths of the audience will be hostile. Snowden will reply with all the venom at his command (I am sure his recent outburst against me was an oblique thrust at you.) He will quote from your speeches at Harrow ten years ago. All the pent-up fury which you have deliberately, and I think quite rightly, roused in so many breasts will simultaneously be released.

The Tories will cheer vociferously and savagely.

Your own orthodox back-benchers will be against you because they will feel that you have delivered a fierce blow at the Government which may well involve their defeat at the next election ...

The cumulative effect of so many hostile forces would overwhelm Napoleon himself.

I don't see how you could hope to stand up against them.

You can't return to us.

And however impelled you may feel to work once more with the 'gentry', you would be wretched if you did. I know to my cost the limitations of the existing young conservatives. They are charming and sympathetic and intelligent at dinner.

But there is not one of them who has either the character or the courage to do anything big ...

What is the alternative?

Surely to remain within the official fold and by making yourself increasingly oppressive and uncomfortable to what Ellen Wilkinson so aptly describes as 'The Bright Old Things' consolidate and strengthen your power. The forces economic and political now at work must assist you.

With every increase in the unemployment figures the position which *you are known* to have taken up becomes more impregnable and easier to justify ... Why should you not work with, and ultimately direct, a moderate Government of the Left?

You occupy a key position at the moment. For God's sake don't chuck it away. Incidentally, if you have a moment to spare, you might modify the divorce laws.

My own difficulties do not diminish with the passage of time and the march of events ...

Good luck to you.

Don't think of answering this.

Yrs ever

Bob

But this letter, with its admirable advice, was about how to play the political game: it was about techniques of how to win by appearing for a time to be steadfast in losing. Tom did not want this: the people with whom he had been playing the game had been making such a nonsense of it for so long that he wanted to give it up altogether. His revulsion was personal rather than political. But then, as Bob Boothby had asked, did he really think he could take on the whole accepted political machinery single-handed? If he would not play according to the rules, did he think he could alter the whole tradition of games playing?

On the afternoon of May 19th Tom had been to see Ramsay MacDonald and had told him he thought he should resign: MacDonald had asked him to reconsider. He found Tom (he wrote in his diary) 'on the verge of being offensively vain in himself'. Johnston pleaded with members of the Cabinet that there was still time to use Tom's talents which had been 'trampled on and ignored'. But people wanted to ignore Tom's talents.

On May 20th he handed his letter of resignation to MacDonald. In it he reiterated that his Memorandum 'was not advanced in any dogmatic spirit' but that he found it 'inconsistent with honour' to remain a member of a government that would not even seriously discuss its election pledges. The letter was written in a tone, MacDonald said, of 'graceless pompousness'. MacDonald added (these comments are in his diary) 'Test of a man's personality is his behaviour in disagreement: in every test he failed.' Most of the newspapers the next day however praised Tom for his courage. The *Daily Herald* added a warning – 'What Mosley needs is a break in his success: he has been a wonder child for too long.'

On May 22nd there was a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party to which Tom, now out of office, could present his proposals over the heads of the Cabinet. G. R. Strauss, a young MP personally unsympathetic to Tom, recorded that Tom's speech to the Parliamentary Party was a 'magnificent piece of rhetoric' and that most MPs were obviously of the opinion that the Memorandum 'should be carefully considered'. J. R. Thomas in a 'lachrymose and emotional vein', announced that it was 'the most humiliating day of his life': but then Arthur Henderson, an experienced tactician in the party game, played one of the traditional moves: he appealed to Tom 'in very moving language to take the noble line' of withdrawing his censure motion against the government to allow further talks to take place – for the sake of party unity. John Strachey whispered to Tom that he should refuse

– 'What people want is action'. Tom did refuse. In the words of G. R. Strauss – 'instantly all the support and sympathy he had received deserted him'. A junior minister remarked 'Pity he didn't withdraw, he would have done himself a lot of good': whereupon Cimmie, overhearing this, said 'He didn't care for his own good, but only for his party!' Tom lost the vote by 29 to 210. His failure to withdraw was seen as a grave tactical blunder. But it made sense in the light of his determination not to go on playing the parliamentary game: and it added to his already somewhat legendary reputation for courage.

And there were, in fact, outside his own party, people who saw precisely that the real battle was not between this or that party but about whether one should, or should not, continue to play political games. On May 27th Harold Macmillan, a young conservative temporarily out of Parliament, had a letter printed in *The Times* in which he said:

> Faced with a startling and even spectacular calamity [the doubling of unemployment figures since Labour took office] Sir Oswald seems to have conceived a novel, and no doubt according to the accepted political standards of what are called 'responsible statesmen', incredibly naive idea. He drew up, and actually went so far as to present to his chief, a memorandum which suggested an attempt should be made to carry out at least some, if not all, of the pledges and promises by the exploitation of which the Socialist Party obtained power ...
>
> Is it to be the accepted rule in our politics that a political programme is to be discarded as soon as it has served its electoral purpose? Are we to accept the cynical view that a statesman is to be applauded in inverse ratio to the extent to which he carries out in office what he has promised in opposition? Must a programme always sink to the level of a fraudulent prospectus? Is a course of action, which in business affairs would end in the Old Bailey, in affairs of state to lead to Downing St and Westminster Abbey? ...
>
> I suspect that this is the real way that the game ought to be played. Only, if the rules are to be permanently enforced, perhaps a good many of us will feel it hardly worth while bothering to play at all. Sir Oswald Mosley thinks that the rules should be altered. I hope some of my friends will have the courage to support and applaud his protest.

The next day R. A. Butler, conservative MP in his first parliament, had (with three other signatories) a letter in *The Times* which said:

> We have read with interest and some surprise Mr Harold Macmillan's

> letter published in your issue of today. When a player starts complaining that it is 'hardly worth while bothering to play' the game at all, it is surely the player, and not the game, which is at fault. It is usually advisable for the player to seek a new field for his recreation and a pastime more suitable to his talents.

On 28th May Tom made his speech in Parliament to justify his resignation: this was his statement of belief that politics should be more than a 'recreation' or a 'pastime'. He reiterated the points of the Mosley Memorandum – an effective machinery of government had to be set up to deal with the unemployment crisis; it was to the home market that people had to turn for the solution to trading problems; after a short-term programme of road building power had to be given to an Executive Committee to control imports, prices, wages, and finance for industry. He spoke without looking at his notes; there was a dazzling display of figures; in a passionate peroration he begged that the country should not be allowed to 'sink to the level of Spain' and exhorted Parliament to give a lead. The message of the speech was epitomised in a sentence half way through – 'the first duty of the government is, after all, to govern'.

When Tom sat down he was cheered. It had been a magnificent performance. The papers the next day were unanimous – 'A tremendous personal triumph': 'one of the most notable parliamentary achievements of modern times': 'the triumph of an artist who has made his genius perfect by long hours of practice and devotion to his art'. But then, with all these curtain-calls as it were – might it not be possible that after all Tom had made a successful move in terms of the game?

He was taking his stand on being the 'honest man' of politics; in the long run such an 'honest man' might have the best chance of winning the highest honours. Tom of course felt this: other people after his resignation began to feel it: Beatrice Webb wrote – 'Has MacDonald found his superseder in Oswald Mosley? MacDonald owes his pre-eminence largely to the fact that he is the only artist, the only aristocrat by temperament and talent in a party of plebeians and plain men . . . But Mosley has all this with the élan of youth, wealth and social position added to them.' She added however in her usual warning style – 'Whether Mosley has Mac's toughness of texture – whether he will not break down in health or in character – I have doubts.'

But one of the manoeuvres by which people who stick to the rules of the game instinctively try to outwit those who do not, is by giving them extravagant applause just when there is no particular danger to the

status quo: like this the rebels get carried away and overreach themselves. And would-be heroes anyway have primitive instincts ready to be tapped by applause. After his resignation speech Tom's mother had written to him:

> My darling Tom,
>
> So many judges and abler folk must have congratulated you on your masterly performance of last night my congratulations are almost absurd. But oh! my dear lad, I can never tell you what it meant to your old mother. I was so full of pride and joy in my man-child it almost choked me. It was wonderful. People of all shades and opinions were thrilled and staggered by 'the finest speech heard in the House for 20 years' ...

Tom had said 'The first duty of a government is to govern': but then, what was he doing resigning from government and putting on magnificent performances? Was he really now going to trust just his own rationality and rhetoric – and other people's rationality in being carried away by his rhetoric – in order to govern? Might this not be the mark of someone with such overweening confidence in himself that it would seem to have sprung from fantasies?

But if he was ever to have a chance of exercising practical power, Tom knew he had to form new loyalties. This was not going to be easy from the ranks of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Jennie Lee, a young Labour MP and one not unsympathetic to Tom at this time, wrote of her own reactions to her colleagues:

> What I was totally unprepared for was the behaviour of the solid rows of decent, well-intentioned unpretentious Labour back benchers. In the long run it was they who did the most deadly damage. Again and again an effort was made to rouse them from their inertia. On every occasion they reacted like a load of damp cement. They would see nothing, do nothing, hear nothing, that had not first been given the seal of MacDonald's approval.

When Tom resigned, the only back benchers who he was certain would be loyal to him were Cimmie and John Strachey. He soon got four other young labour MPs to commit themselves to some sort of an alliance – W. J. Brown, Oliver Baldwin, Robert Forgan and Aneurin Bevan. He also got young MPs from the other parties interested in talking about alliance – from the Conservatives Harold Macmillan, Bob Boothby,

Oliver Stanley, Walter Elliott, Henry Mond; from the Liberals Archibald Sinclair and Leslie Hore-Belisha. During the summer the unemployment figures rose to over two million: the battle more than ever seemed to Tom to be not between this party and that, but between anyone who seemed interested in getting something done and those who did not. Tom himself saw it in many respects still as a battle of the young against the old. In June he wrote an article in the *Sunday Express* in which he claimed that the young man of today was:

> a hard, realistic type, hammered into existence on the anvil of great ordeal: in mind and spirit he is much further away from the pre-war man than he is from an ancient Roman or from any other product of ages which were dynamic like his own. For this age is dynamic and the pre-war age was static. The men of the pre-war age are much 'nicer' people than we are, just as their age was much more pleasant than the present time. The practical question is whether their ideas for the solution of the problems of our age are better than the ideas of those whom that age has produced.

This was the language of some sort of heroism – of preparation for future battle; of appeal to the glories of the past. It was this that attracted would-be knights to Tom's banner. 'In those days Mosley's drawing room was an exciting place' Hugh Massingham, a journalist, wrote: 'the gay Bob Boothby flitted in and out: there was John Strachey who could be relied on to give the talk a Marxist twist: C. E. M. Joad, a philosopher of sorts, could be discovered cowering in a corner occasionally letting out a squeak of protest whenever the necessity of violence was mentioned which it usually was'. Harold Nicolson, himself a member of the group, wrote – 'They talk about the decay of democracy and of parliamentarianism. They discuss whether it would be well to have a fascist coup. They are most disrespectful of their various party leaders.'

Two politicians from the older generation were naturally attracted to such ebullience – Lloyd George and Winston Churchill. They occasionally joined in discussions. There were also the press lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere in the background; who by their vocation were interested in matters sensational or dynamic. Beaverbrook wrote to Tom, 'I am ready at any moment to make overtures in your direction in public if you wish me to do so'. Churchill made a speech at Oxford in which he echoed Tom's proposal that an Executive Committee should be set up 'free altogether from party exigencies and composed of persons possessing special qualifications in economic

matters'. One reason why Churchill, Beaverbrook and Rothermere were interested in Tom was the fact that in his economic thinking he was coming to the conclusion that the closed economic area over which the government should have tight control should be expanded from the home market to include the Empire and Commonwealth. With all this talk and intrigue going on it could not have worried Tom much that the 'damp cement' of Labour was not following him. Beatrice Webb wrote 'He will be a great success at public meetings; but will he get round the Arthur Hendersons, the Herbert Morrisons, the Alexanders, the Citrines and the Bevins ... the natural leaders of the proletariat?' Tom and even Cimmie were even demonstrably not worrying: they went out a lot during that summer to parties: Tom seems to have felt liberated by the fact that he had staked everything like a gambler on forming his own group.

Bob Boothby wrote to him another of his long, marvellous letters setting out his opinions on gambling and the sort of odds a gambler has to face because there are rules even for adventurers.

My dear Tom,

If ever I signed on the dotted line I would play to the end – and beyond.

I think you know that.

But *in the meantime* I don't think the game is practical politics, and for the following reasons.

(1) Our chaps won't play, and it's no use your deluding yourself that they will. You saw Oliver [Stanley]'s reactions last night.

Of the whole lot Walter and I would be most useful, because we have a territorial base and between us we could shake up Scotland. But Walter has spent the last twelve months consolidating his position in the Conservative party: he has won for himself a good deal of rank-and-file support: he won't give it up unless he's sure he's going to win. And he doesn't think this will win.

As for Oliver, his influence could, and almost certainly would, be countered by Edward Stanley. And so far as the Conservatives are concerned, Harold would be a definite liability. I know you think I'm prejudiced against him. I'm not. But even on the assumption he decided to play (a large one) how many votes can he sway.

Not one.

Who is left?

George Lloyd, generally regarded as the 'Super Diehard' and rightly or wrongly regarded in many quarters as a shit. And this brings me to

the second point about our chaps, which is that they simply aren't good enough for the job (I include myself with becoming modesty).

(2) Now what about your side? I agree you can sway more votes than any other contemporary politician.

But I don't believe, at present, that you can bring over any substantial section of organised Trades Unionism. And as for the Parliamentary Party, do you really think you can send Aneurin Bevan to the Admiralty to lay down more cruisers, and John Strachey to spank the blacks? I confess I doubt it. Who else is there? The mugwumps who comprise 95% of your party will be solidly arrayed against you. The intelligentsia of the Dalton–Baker school will be actively and venomously hostile.

(3) We come now to the main source of strength – Beaverbrook, with the dubious support of Rothermere.

Beaverbrook's qualities are sufficiently obvious. I don't know him as well as you do. But I have long since come to the conclusion that he would be very nearly impossible to work with. And, as Oliver pointed out, he is in the impregnable position (which we are not and never can be) of being able to double cross and let down the side at a moment's notice without loss of power or even prestige.

If he were to do that we should be marooned, and ultimately sunk politically.

One other point.

What is going to be the reaction of the great British public to a Beaverbrook-Mosley-Rothermere-Lloyd-Macmillan-Stanley-Boothby combination?

I don't know. But they might conceivably say 'By God, now all the shits have climbed into the same basket, so we know where we are.' Would they be so far out? ...

(5) Lastly, don't underestimate the power of the political machines. I believe that in the long run it far exceeds that of the press ...

On this assumption, the only game worth playing is to try and collar one or other of the machines, and not ruin yourself by beating against them with a tool which will almost certainly break in your hand.

To all this I make one qualification and one only.

If there is a really serious economic crisis this winter, there may be a widespread demand for a national government, new men, and new measures.

It must come from the country and be *interpreted* by the press. If

it does come, then the situation will be fundamentally changed, and a game of a kind we cannot yet envisage may open out ...

Well my dear Tom, I've been very frank. I always will be with you, and I hope you don't mind. I happen to think you can do more for us than anyone else now alive – a view I've held, and from which I've never deviated, for six years.

Only for God's sake remember that this country is old, obsolete and tradition-ridden; and no one, not even you, can break all the rules at once. And do take care of the company you keep. Real shits are so apt to trip you up when you aren't looking. And flat-catchers who want to be hauled along are only an encumbrance.

No answer.

Yours ever
Bob

CHAPTER 16

Cimmie in Russia

At the beginning of 1930 Cimmie wrote in her usual style to Tom:

> Sweetie fellow, this is just a line to tell him on New Years' Day of all the wishes wished thoughts thought and resolutions resolved by her on New Year's Eve. Does hope 1930 will be a happy one for them both. Does hope he will go on loving her. *Sure* she will love him. Will try try to do everything she can to make it a success.
>
> Success politically. Success fun and good times.
>
> Success them 2 together ...

Cimmie was busy in local and national politics during 1930. She opened nursery schools and art exhibitions in Stoke; spoke at a Labour Party May Day rally at Alexandra Palace in North London; spoke in Parliament in favour of the Rural Amenities Bill which gave greater governmental powers to safeguard the environment, and in favour of the Bill which ratified the provisions of the Court of International Justice at The Hague. Her speaking voice, a reporter said, was 'like that of Cordelia – soft, gentle and low: "an excellent thing in a woman".' She wrote an article in the *Sunday Express* which considered whether or not rich socialists should spend money on their children's education (her sister Irene called this 'shattering bilge'): she gave an interview on the radio on the subject of Social Conventions. In this she was eloquently in favour of breaking conventions: 'I want to bring out the frightful danger latent in *all* conventions, of their proving an obstacle to living thought and self-expression, because that for me is the most precious thing in life – lose that and you lose everything.' She got quite a few letters in response to this broadcast – one from a 17-year-old girl who wanted to be a dirt-track rider and asked Cimmie for the loan of £50 to set her up.

She backed Tom publicly in his struggles with J. H. Thomas: privately, in spite of her resolutions and perhaps because Tom was becoming increasingly under strain, their quarrels – and her own part in them – seemed to get worse. In April Irene was recording in her diary – 'That naughty Cim kept having awful gibes at Tom so unnecessarily as he was quite peaceful.' Then in July – 'Cim and Tom had a couple of sparring matches Tom as usual scoring in getting a raging rise out of Cim.' And later – after a dinner party in Irene's house with Cim and Tom and Sacheverell and Georgia Sitwell – Irene found 'Cim and Tom having a row about some stupid bill and he dashed off in the car in a rage and poor dazed Cim still could not see how it had all arisen'.

Two days before this myself, aged seven, had been taken to a nursing home for an operation for appendicitis. On the night of their row Cimmie stayed on in Irene's house and wrote to Tom:

> 3 Deanery St W.1.
>
> I don't know what you felt like when you got home but I know I have seldom felt worse, it is now 3 o'clock-ish and I am still sitting on my bed not having closed an eye – I cannot make out what it is all about, I am entirely bewildered, I just don't understand – why have you been so horrid to me, not only tonight but ever since I got up from chickenpox. As the sound of my voice and my presence (and you've seen so little of me) seems to drive you demented I resort to poor Irene's method of putting pen to paper ... You leave me *alone* in London for weekend to look after Nicky and go away with another woman for weekend. You never see Nicky from before his op Sat am till Mon evening ...

The woman whom Tom went away with might have been Georgia Sitwell, with whom Tom was carrying on about this time: there is a letter from her to Tom consisting of just one enormous O covering most of the page which seems to have been some symbol of sexuality. (It was Georgia Sitwell who said to Tom's second wife, Diana, later in life – 'Of course we all went to bed with him but afterwards we were rather ashamed'). One of the points of conflict now between Tom and Cimmie concerned a flat that Tom had got at 22 Ebury Street, about a mile from the family home in Smith Square. Ostensibly Tom had rented this flat in order that he should have peace to do his work as a government minister: but the flat consisted of one huge and very elegant room like a stageset for a bachelor's apartment; the bed was in an alcove at the back across which curtains could be drawn and (one of the occupants

remembers) at the press of a switch warm air be wafted in. Cimmie had felt that the style of this was not aimed at entertaining Ramsay MacDonald or J. H. Thomas.

Cimmie's letter to Tom, written from Irene's house, continued –

> I feel very lonely and unutterably depressed and so puzzled and tired it is difficult to think or even see much ... I know you'll make out it's all my fault ... I could not think why it went on and then you driving off after what you said. Why did you?

Tom was apparently clever at making out things were another person's fault: also probably at using rows as a means of being able to get away – and do what he wanted. And then, the next morning, he could think about making things up again. He wrote to Cimmie:

> Darling Fellow,
> Terribly sorry if I upset you, but you did drive me almost demented – and he too was upset all right! It is that aggressive student talking about little things which (1) do not matter (2) could be settled in two minutes quiet talk – do be your own sweet self – a charming woman – and not a lawyer attacking a hostile witness. We are all rather on edge after a very tiring session and many worries – do try to make the little things of life easy and not more difficult. I do love you so and was so looking forward to seeing you again and longing to get off to the South of France with you away from all this turmoil – you can be the sweetest most feminine one in all the world, or you can be a real old nagging harridan which you were last night (but I do understand you too are on edge a little after Nick) ... I believe you are lunching out but we will dine together and I will ring you up at Nina's 7 pm if you are not in the H of C. So much love. Tom

It was true all this was happening at a time when Tom was increasingly under strain in public life: he knew he might not be able to get back into conventional party politics: he had chosen his role of gambler. He probably felt it consistent that he should gamble on getting everything that he wanted in private life too. He would have the power to rationalise to himself that it was not his fault if this sort of thing caused Cimmie pain: he did his best to leave her free to do as she wanted. He would probably not consciously have seen that one of the reasons why he had strength as a gambler was because she, having suffered, was still there for him to come back to.

People close to Cimmie and Tom were trying to 'get her to see she ought to stand up to him and give him a fright' (Irene): this presumably meant threaten to leave him. But Cimmie could not do this. It remained a mystery however about Tom and Cimmie why she as much as he insisted on their having 'fun' in places like Antibes and Venice – where one of the rules of the social game was simply that husbands should try to get off with other people's wives. But now at the end of the summer of 1930, they did plan, for a while, to go their separate ways. After the usual two or three weeks at Antibes (I myself, after my operation, had followed the main party with Nanny in a bath chair or being carried by porters) Cimmie went off on a trip to Turkey and Russia accompanied by her friend Zita James. Tom went with her as far as Venice, then returned to the South of France.

Cimmie's trip to Russia is of interest because it seems to have been her effort to gain some independence from Tom: for a time she seemed to be succeeding. Zita was one of two sisters (Zita and Theresa Jungman) who were in the social worlds of London and Venice and the South of France: she had recently married: she too was travelling apart from her husband. She kept a diary, which provides glimpses of Cimmie in her efforts to be herself apart from Tom. Cimmie and Zita met in Athens, where –

> We went out to see the Acropolis at sunset. Of course it didn't come off again and Cimmie was bitterly mocking – I was rather annoying and kept giving details about blank bits of stone that I'd heard the guide saying days before. I felt rather like a governess but couldn't stop myself. I was annoyed that the sunset was so bad. In the meantime Cimmie had left a message for a Greek young man she knew about, and later as we were lying on our beds in the hotel shouting from one room to another a card came up to say he was waiting below so we hurried and Cimmie went on down. I found her drinking a cocktail with a very good looking Greek and a very American American called Francis Peabody Krane. After a good deal of gay talk and familiar badinage we finally decided to go in Peabody's car to a native restaurant on a hill far away.

They went on the American's yacht, they swam, they had picnics: 'after a huge meal Cimmie and Kartali (the Greek) went and lay down on the moonlit horizon and talked in whispers to each other while Peabody went miles to fetch me a cushion'. They went to see the church at

Daphne; they did not think much of the museum at Athens. They travelled on by boat to Istanbul, where Cimmie wrote to Tom:

Hotel M. Tokatlian. Istanbul. Sept 5th 1930

Darling Sweetie, you will never guess what I did yesterday. I think something very exciting, but in order to get you all expectant I won't tell you yet. We had hardly arrived before a very insignificant young man called round from the Embassy to say Sir George Clerk [the ambassador] was away in Ankara but he was to put a car at our disposal so we arranged to have it for the next day ... We sight-saw, but really there is nothing much: Mosques awfully ugly and Sophia definitely disapointing. Afterwards heavenly time in lagoon and then a row in caique up to Eyouli and a moonlight picnic in the cemetery and coffee in the cafe where Pierre Loti used to sit. Yesterday morning more sightseeing; lunch at Embassy where we made a great hit with Sir George who is taking us out all day on his yacht today – and then we did the exciting thing. They all said at the Embassy we would never pull it off.

But we did!

We went and saw Trotsky!!

You know he lives on a small island called Prinkipo about hour and ½ away from here by boat. He is allowed nowhere else in the world. So I thought – We'll go off to Prinkipo and try! Wrote a lovely note and set off. Deposited outside iron gate at top of hill, long straggling walk down between vegetables to a fountain small pond court and square peeling white house. By this time a sec: had popped out to ask us our business – he said it was *quite* impossible – never done. I said well anyway could he not take my letter. No. Well could he not read it himself – which he did. He then reconsidered and said he would go and see. In a few moments he was back and said the great man would receive us. So up we went through an absolutely bare hall absolutely bare staircase another absolutely bare room except for thousands of newspapers knocked on a door and there we were. Magnificent head, masses and swirls of the most beautifully cared-for grey hair, the softest most soigné rather sallow skin, *huge* eyes behind prince nez, large thick fleshy mouth, moustache and imperial, immaculate snowy white suit and *beautiful* hands – nails polished and shining. He was courteous and charming and talked for about ½ an hour, absolutely scathing about English Labs. Very funny. And Clynes and Duchess of York got it very hot.

Cimmie's description of her visit to Trotsky ends here abruptly. Her long letter then continues, for pages, to talk about her relationship with Tom. Other accounts of the visit to Trotsky are of interest however both on account of the incident itself (Trotsky had been outlawed from Russia the year before and had few contacts with the outside world) and because they confirm the impression that to Cimmie the visit was at least in part some dare-devil act which she could present as a trophy to Tom.

Zita had written in her diary about lunch at the Embassy the previous day:

> We could see the secretaries and wives sniggering as we told rather exaggerated stories of what up to now we had done, they thought us a little mad, so we piled it on and said the most startling things. Cimmie capped the lot by declaring that she was going that afternoon to see Trotsky. At this suggestion the whole table went off into a guffaw, several bets were placed against us achieving our object, and everyone winked slyly round the table and patronised our idiocy ... We went back to the hotel where Cimmie composed a letter beginning 'Dear Comrade Trotsky' and ending 'Yours fraternally'. She took his book of memoirs under her arm and off we started for the ferry boat.

Trotsky recorded his own account of the visit in his published diary for 1935. He had made a reference to Tom as 'the aristocratic coxcomb who joined the Labour party as a short cut to a career'; and then reminisced:

> In September 1930 ... Cynthia Mosley, the wife of the adventurer and daughter of the notorious Lord Curzon, visited me at Prinkipo. At that stage her husband was still attacking MacDonald 'from the left'. After some hesitation I agreed to a meeting which, however, proved banal in the extreme. The 'Lady' arrived with a female travelling companion, referred contemptuously to MacDonald, and spoke of her sympathies towards Soviet Russia. But the enclosed letter from her is an adequate specimen of her attitude at that time. About three years later the young woman suddenly died. I don't know if she lived long enough to cross over into the fascist camp.

But the letter which Cimmie wrote to Trotsky and which Trotsky printed in his diary showed something of her genuine enthusiasm and courage.

Dear Comrade Trotsky,

I would like above all things to see you for a few moments. There is no good reason why you should see me as (1) I belong to the Labour Party in England who were so ridiculous and refused to allow you in but also I belong to the ILP and we did try our very best to make them change their minds; and (2) I am daughter of Lord Curzon who was Minister of Foreign Affairs in London when you were in Russia!

On the other hand I am an ardent Socialist. I am a member of the House of Commons. I think less than nothing of the present government. I have just finished reading your life which inspired me as no other book has done for ages. I am a great admirer of yours. These days when great men seem so very few and far between it would be a great privilege to meet one of the enduring figures of our age and I do hope with all my heart you will grant me that privilege. I need hardly say I come as a private person, not a journalist nor *anything* but myself – I am on my way to Russia – I leave for Batoum – Tiflis – Rostov – Kharkov and Moscow by boat Monday. I have come to Principo this afternoon especially to try to see you, but if it were not convenient I could come out again any day till Monday. I do hope however you could allow me a few moments this afternoon.

Yours fraternally

Cynthia Mosley

A few days after her exploit with Trotsky, Cimmie performed another feat which seemed aimed at demonstrating her energy and independence and reporting this to Tom. She swam across the straits of the Bosphorus from Asia to Europe – a distance of about a mile. Zita, who accompanied her by boat, reported – 'When she got about half way across it became more difficult as the current was so strong ... large steamers began to pass and their huge wash became very tiring. I kept screaming "Look out!" and Cimmie began to get a little cross. However after one or two desperate moments the heroic deed was accomplished.'

Cimmie went back to her hotel to write immediately of this new deed to Tom. But there she found a telegram from him of which the words, it would seem, did not contain much beyond the usual reassuring and encouraging noises he used to make to her. But it made Cimmie write:

Sunday 7th Hotel M. Tokatlian

Oh Billo, just to show you what an ass I am your wire has just come and I feel suicidal. Why. It came from Le Lavandou, what on earth

are you doing there unless you have popped off with Paula? I have always longed to go to Le Lavandou, you never would – why now – only to hide. Darling darling you would have been better never to wire me or else to explain why you were there, it has just spoilt everything for me. Even when I am hundreds of miles away your shadow falls on me. How can I ever dare to have holidays away from you – and yet it may be nothing, you may be there with a large party. Then why not all sign the gram. No doubt you'll explain it away. But as the song says – 'How am I to know?' How fed up I am with love. I suppose I ought not to mind but I do so damnably I don't know what to do. Can hardly bear to face dinner and all the rest. Can't wire you as have no address.

Hell Hell Hell. If it's true, I think you and Paula unspeakable cads. If it's not true, then I do apologise, but wish you had not caused the unnecessary anguish – you might have said why you were there – I suppose you thought they wouldn't put where the tel: came from.

So you see all my talk about self sufficiency serenity peace etc – Balls Balls Balls

– goes in 1 second at the bare hint of an idea from you.

Ought (1) to trust you not to do such a thing, or –

(2) not to mind if you did.

The first impossible, as I fear I have *never really* in my heart of hearts trusted you in that way. The second however much as I try I cannot help such a flame of misery jealousy resentment I can't cope.

Please forgive me if it is all nothing, perhaps I shouldn't even write and keep all my doubts to myself; but somehow I can't do that, it seems clearer to get it off my chest. And darling when I came in I was so gay and full of myself and elated and just sitting down to write you that I had just swum the Bosphorus from Asia to Europe against a strong current in 40 minutes – thought you'd be thrilled – I thought it so terribly in the Grand Style and Byronic and even rather Mosley – and now – those stupid names of tunes – they are so apposite –

What is this thing called love
How am I to know?

I don't, either.

I will wire an address from Batoum for you to write. Don't be angry if I am all wrong it's because I love you so awfully. Even if I am not wrong I suppose you'll pretend I am. What a farce it all is.

I wish you were here with me.

We are off to Russia tomorrow.
I'll try to forget about all this. Poor Tom
Poor Tim
My sweetie one.
Blessings.
Mum

Cimmie never spoke to Zita about any of this. The next day they got on an Italian boat bound for Batum, in Russia, at the eastern end of the Black Sea. They 'settled down into a sort of routine ... we both adored reading and hardly spoke to each other: we invented games and ate rather a lot in view of the future' (Zita). They had a vague certainty that in Russia 'we should be starved and imprisoned and probably shot and at any rate never come out of the country the same as we went into it. The Captain was horrified at the idea of our going to Russia and said we ought to be at home with our husbands.'

While she was on the boat Cimmie probably dwelt on the things that seemed never to be far from her mind about Tom. The letter she had written to him directly after her visit to Trotsky had continued, after she had told him the news of her exploit:

> About our life. I will try, but also remember I *do* try all the time, it's when I am so tired of trying I get so difficult. I never seem to be able to let up trying. As to not having complexes about you oh how difficult – only because I care for you so much – that is what makes it difficult; and all the side of me you hate, the hard defiant knock-me-down, curiously enough is created by you – an attempt by me to clap on some pieces of armour – a sort of sanctuary inside where I was inviolate and you could not get at me – I might behave outwardly more sensibly but up to now I have not been able to preserve one solitary atom or portion of me that you could not get at and hurt almost beyond endurance ...
>
> I fear so awfully all my efforts to adjust myself to you so as not to be hurt result in the very symptoms that make you hurt me more – If I appear to 'don't care' by being 'don't care', you just get fiercer and fiercer and destroy me more and more: and to just submit to being hurt without putting up some show seems to me almost unendurable. So far I have only achieved not being hurt by you (and rarely enough at that) by thinking you a cad and a swine – by despising your methods – oh dear how difficult it all is! – as quite beyond question you matter more to me than anything in the world.

With the children when you are sweet to me I could die of joy. But as you say: in term-time you have to work so very hard – with other people: in hols you play hard – with other people. Where does Mum come in?

It's all very well to talk of the great life we could build up together but we never are together – and don't go off and say we are more together than any other married couple as that is bosh – in the sense I mean *together* we are very little. This may seem an ungenerous answer to you but these letters are no good unless they face facts – after all we have written them before, and the real life we can have – and I agree with you we can have it – must and can only come if we really take trouble about it. You must take some trouble about me. You will say I must about you – my answer is I never seem to cease bothering about you, tho' you may find that hard to believe ...

Always remember I adore YOU – tho' loathing the thing that masquerades as you every so often and is cruel and unkind and often despicable ... It's the same about me, the real ME is a dear, but the horrid student creature that I become is awful – but I only become it to fight the masquerading you. Let's both be YOU and ME. I swear I'll try.

But you MUST. I can't do it alone.

There is no way of knowing the words by which Tom 'destroyed' Cimmie more and more, since this was always done face to face with his cutting tongue and not by letter. In later life, when Tom wanted to be rude to people he was just rude; with his chin up, barking at people to 'get out', or stabbing at them with his heavy, relentless sarcasm. But Cimmie in her letter did seem able for the first time to stand back and see that a proper way of describing what was happening to her and Tom might be that there was in each of them something that took them over and made them helpless in their efforts to deal with themselves or each other by will. There was something in Tom that needed to protect himself by having her enslaved: there was something in her that, in pain, still could not escape from enslavement. Tom could not stand back from himself enough to talk to Cimmie in these terms; he was too successful with his manipulations.

Cimmie and Zita landed at Batum; they travelled by train and bus into the Caucasus; they got a boat from Batum to Yalta and from there went by train to Kharkov and Kiev. Their impressions of Russia were much the same as impressions of tourists have been for fifty years: they noted the delays, the inefficiency, the subjects that could not be talked

about; at the same time there was 'that queer intangible new spirit, everyone equal, no classes' (Cimmie in a letter to Tom). Also – 'all the nonsense talked about only wearing old clothes so as not to be conspicuous, typhoid, the frightful food shortages, no soap – bunk from beginning to end'. From the Caucasus, Zita had written of 'The Children of the Night – the children who, directly after the revolution, without parents or guardians, infested the whole of Russia especially the south: they were the essence of vice, disease, crime and terror: there are supposed to be few left now, but this little band had the most terrifying faces I have ever imagined'. Cimmie on the coast of the Black Sea had admired the 'thrilling modern white blocks of sanatoria'. They both were rather impressed by the public nude bathing of both sexes. And they wondered why Stalin had thought it profitable to get rid of so many intellectuals.

In Kharkov they discovered from the Intourist office that Cimmie's sister Irene, in the company of John Strachey, had passed through the day before on their way down from Moscow. This rather dampened their feeling of being pioneers. They went on to Moscow where they found in a 'spotlessly clean hotel which 'looked almost normal' other Labour MPs, including G. R. Strauss and Jennie Lee. Cimmie found also a letter from Tom, in answer to the one she had posted in Istanbul.

Darling Baby Mutton, 22 b Ebury Street. S.W.1.

What a mutt she is! What a let to write him – What an upset to give herself – and him because he felt she was upset! Toured the coast from Cannes to Toulon – *alone or with parties* – got Daisy's speedboat Fish (without owner included let me hasten to add) (and further only 300 francs a day) and had glorious time – shot to and fro just the king of every beach [drawing of pig or sheep] – met many people knew at various spots but much Byronic solitude (which is growing on him a lot in her absence – great feature!) St Maxim's and more especially St Tropez proved enormous fun on revisits. Marvellous man with concertina and all Cannes dancing in Marie Antoinette humours at your little restaurant. Found ever so many small cheap but charming places with lovely sand beaches for the children (needless to say the real object of his pilgrimage!) Thinks he hears a porker sizzling.

Silly fellow, if he had been on such an expedition would he have telegraphed you from the rendez-vous? He may be wicked but he is not such a mutt as that. That place was lovely but I think better still Cavalaire which is nearer to St Tropez and has the same sand beach. Of course would never do it before, as had never had his fill of rest,

immobility and fun – a few days after return to Cannes however had more than enough – very hectic and most of nice people went – further in-solitude-Byron feature plus a speedboat.

What a clever mutt to swim the Hellespont – big and proud Byron mutton! [drawing of sheep swimming]. Sorry, good resolution, never make jokes. Kiss nose. Or pat bottom [drawing of a bottom with a caption 'verboten']. And he is lapsing already (but he loves her so much). Thought her letter did not go very far to meet his sweet and sympathetic gestures. So glad however she is having a lovely time and do hope it will last to the end.

Just been alone to see a flying film *The Dawn Patrol* – best yet – overdrawn in personal things but wonderful flying pictures – very reminiscent – moved and depressed. Seen only serious people in London and been mostly alone – rang up no one of friends – but expect have little tiny bit of various fun in Paris – where he wishes his Mutt was because he misses and loves her so. Resolved to be the perfect husband. She is not to be such a Porker and roarer because she can be sweetest one in world whom he loves. [Drawing of rather wild-looking sheep or pig with the caption 'The Corsair between Cannes and Toulon!!!!']

In Moscow Cimmie and Zita were taken to some show-piece prison in the company of other political tourists. Zita reported – 'The Head of the Reformatory was more than charming and seemed to be an angel of goodness with an immense paternal love and kindness for all his prisoners ... he explained Russia's theories about prison and punishment. He said that their idea was that crime was due almost entirely to environment, and that therefore all they needed was to remove the criminal and place him in another position.' However she did add 'Really I suppose they were completely under control.'

Cimmie, worrying about Tom, must have wondered, having received his letter, about the ways in which politicians use words with little regard for truth. But then, with politicians, what does one do for truth? There was no way of Cimmie knowing with whom, if anyone, Tom had been in the South of France: he had almost certainly been with someone. But then, there were his usual protestations of love. Cimmie seemed to be stuck – as perhaps some Russians might have been feeling stuck – with this endless, vaguely persuasive, duplicity of words. Cimmie had written to Tom from Kharkov – 'Oh I wonder when I will become any better about you: you have me tied up in one of those knots well nigh impossible to undo.'

Back in London Tom was preparing for the Labour Party Conference; which was to be his last conventional platform of appeal to people to listen to the logic of his words.

CHAPTER 17

The Mosley Manifesto

In one of his letters of the summer Bob Boothby had set out what he believed to be the alternatives facing Tom – '(1) Staying where you are, consolidating and strengthening your hold on the Labour movement in the country and persuading the workers that they will not always be betrayed; or (2) making another speech or two along recent lines and crossing the floor in the autumn. You would be amazed at the welcome you would get.' He had added – 'The former is the long term policy and involves a further bleak period in the wilderness: (2) assures power at an early date, but power limited by the Tory machine, and the knowledge that you can't change again.'

Bob Boothby believed that the Labour government was coming to an end because of its failure to deal with unemployment; that the Tories would soon get in with a huge majority. Liberals would be of no account. 'Two machines, and two only, right and left, will wield political power in this country in the years that lie ahead.' He assured Tom that, if he stayed within the fold of either of the party machines, 'I have not the slightest doubt that you would win through in the end'.

Tom's chance to get a hold on the Labour Party machine occurred at the party conference at Llandudno in October 1930. During the summer his prestige amongst party workers does not seem to have weakened: his stand appearing as the 'honest man' was bearing fruit. He had had copies of his Memorandum printed and sent to local Labour parties with the request that they should consider it and give their opinions on it at the Party Conference: this of course did not make him popular with party leaders. Professional Labour politicians have the gang-solidarity of people accustomed to fight as underdogs; they are particularly susceptible to feelings of betrayal.

At the conference Ramsay MacDonald 'made a wonderful speech: he

said nothing whatever, but he said it so eloquently that the delegates were deeply moved' (John Scanlon). Then Tom spoke: he could match MacDonald for eloquence: he also had a policy which delegates could think they might fight for – or die for. In his peroration Tom told those who might follow him – 'at best they would have their majority; at worst they would go down fighting for the things they believed in: they would not die like an old woman in bed: they would die like men on the field – a better fate and, in politics, one with a more certain hope of resurrection.'

A journalist in the *Sunday Graphic* wrote – 'There was stillness save for Mosley's voice gathering in power. Boldly, challengingly, he gave his own plan to restore stability ... The throng was hypnotised by the man, by his audacity, as bang! bang! bang! he thundered directions. The thing that got hold of the conference was that here was a man with a straight-cut policy. It leapt at him.'

Fenner Brockway reported that Tom got 'the greatest ovation he had ever heard at a party conference'. Tom was compared by one commentator to Hitler; by another to Moses. There was a vote taken on a resolution that the Memorandum should be submitted again for consideration by the National Executive Committee. Tom's supporters lost the vote by the narrow margin of 1,046,000 to 1,251,000 – the miners having at the last minute transferred their block vote away from Tom against the advice of their leader A. J. Cook. (There was a story that Cook himself had got held up in a taxi or he might have swayed the vote: there seems no hard evidence for this). But it did not seem to people in the hall that the vote much mattered anyway. The vote had been to do with a technical matter of loyalties: in emotion, party workers were overwhelmingly behind Tom. He was elected to the National Executive of the party: J. H. Thomas lost his seat on it. John Scanlon wrote:

> In the Press and the Labour Movement itself the discussion now centred round the question of how long it would be before Sir Oswald became the party leader. Even without a crash in the Party's fortunes it was easy to see that changes must come soon. The controllers of the Labour Party, mostly old men, could not stay the inexorable march of time any more than ordinary mortals. No other leader was in sight. Mr Wheatley was gone. Mr Maxton had none of the pushful qualities which carry a man to leadership in Labour politics, and nobody in the trade unions showed the slightest sign of being able to take charge. Therefore every prophet fixed on Sir

> Oswald as the next party leader. Even Socialists, who had no particular love for Sir Oswald, were saying nothing could stop it. All the prophets, however, had overlooked the one man who could stop it – Sir Oswald himself.

Tom himself used to say he might soon have become *de facto* party leader under the nominal leadership of Arthur Henderson. But in order to do this he would have had to work in with the party machine; to humour it, tinker with it, play the political game. His refusal to do this was made partly on an intellectual assessment – he believed that it was the mechanisms of bureaucratic party politics that prevented anything decisive being done – but it was also an emotional decision: he had no natural taste, nor aptitude, for the painstaking and boring manoeuvrings of committees. What he liked, and was good at, was the manipulation of crowds by his oratory and of individuals by his reasoning and charm. After the Llandudno conference it was these talents that he wanted to exercise: he probably had little clear idea, at first, of where the results might lead.

He was perfecting his style as a mob orator – that strange music by which crowds are swayed like snakes. He would declaim – 'We are a party with our eyes on the stars, but let us also remember that our feet are planted firmly in the earth, on muddy soil, where men are suffering and looking at us with eyes of questioning and anguish saying "Lift us up from the mud! give us practical remedies here and now!"' For practical remedies he was returning with renewed vigour to the matter of trying to form political alliances in London. In his thinking he was putting more and more emphasis on a policy of protecting and controlling trade with empire countries: this was indeed ensuring the interest of the Tories: Stanley Baldwin remarked that Tom was 'now producing ideas which I remember giving voice to in 1903'. But Tom's feelings did not change that if ever he was to do anything decisive in politics he would have to lead an alliance of his own. And in fact there seemed to be more potential rebels in the Labour than in the Conservative Party.

In December 1930 a short four-page *Manifesto* appeared entitled *A National Policy for National Emergency*. It was signed by seventeen Labour MP's: amongst them Aneurin Bevan, John Strachey, W. J. Brown, and the two Mosleys – and A. J. Cook, the miners' leader. It became known as *The Mosley Manifesto* (as distinct from the Mosley Memorandum of earlier in the year): it was obviously dedicated to Tom's ideas, though it was written mainly by Strachey and Brown and Bevan. It's main recommendation was that 'an Emergency Cabinet of not more than five

ministers without portfolios' should be set up and 'invested with power to carry through the emergency policy'. The emergency was that the unemployed had now increased to two and a half million: the policy was that 'we should aim at building within the Commonwealth a civilisation high enough to absorb the production of modern machinery which for the purpose must be insulated from wrecking forces in the rest of the world'. This policy was necessary, it was claimed, because there was no other way that either conservatism or socialism would not be at the mercy of the whims of what Tom later called 'international finance'. Nearly all the signatories were young labour MP's in their first Parliament: they had not had time to feel themselves dependent on Parliamentary institutions. It was difficult for older MPs to be sympathetic towards the Manifesto because it was contemptuous of existing institutions. Also for orthodox conservatives it was too socialistic and for orthodox socialists too imperialistic. The manifesto got much publicity: but discussion was apt to descend to the level of jokes about who would be the five 'dictators'. All this confirmed Tom in his belief that if anything was to be done he would have to lead some new political alignment.

All this was according to reason: there remained the practical politics. Tom saw that if he was to make anything of his 'New Labour Group' (as those who agreed with the Manifesto had come to be called) then he would have to equip it with a specific organisation and with funds: this would require publicity: at the same time too much publicity might alarm people, before the funds and embryonic organisation were there. Tom was on a political tight-rope. Allan Young, Tom's political secretary, wrote to Cimmie – 'I am more content now to accept Tom's leadership than ever before. He is made for the job that has to be done ... He has displayed all the qualities of intellectual courage and ability, combined with the caution great actions demand.'

Tom had for some time been making soundings about whether it might be possible to gain backing for his proposals from industrialists or from financiers in the City – and for any organisation committed to putting the proposals into effect. He had had one or two meetings with William Morris, later Lord Nuffield, who had become interested in the *Mosley Manifesto*. In January 1931 Morris sent for Tom and handed him a cheque for £50,000 with the remark 'Don't think, my boy, that money like this grows on gooseberry bushes.' This was a fateful moment for Tom. He thought that other money would follow. He felt that it not only made possible, but was a portent for now putting into effect, his plans for starting his own movement.

Bob Boothby uttered his last precise cry of warning and lament.

Jan 30th 1931 Carlton Club
Pall Mall SW1

Dear Tom,

... Since you wrote and told me that you proposed to play your hand in your own way I never sought to enquire what you were doing. But I imagined you were devoting yourself to the task of building up and consolidating your position in the Labour movement.

If it be true that you are trying to raise money in the City then I feel I must say once more – and for the last time – that I believe this to be madness from your own point of view; and leave it at that.

I became uneasy from the first moment the word 'cash' was mentioned, because I never thought it could be raised except under more or less false pretences: and I don't believe that money, even in large quantities, can ever start a new political movement in this country (witness the fate of L.G., the Empire Crusade, and your own effort years ago with Cowdray).

You will remember that I left the dinner party given by Col. Portal at the Garrick Club because I so heartily disapproved of it.

You are, of course, right to pursue the course you think best.

But I too am entitled to my opinions which in this case are very decided.

Last night I turned up some notes that I made of the letters which I wrote to you during the course of last year.

I find that you have persistently disregarded every single piece of advice or suggestion that I have ever ventured to offer.

And so, my dear Tom, I cannot feel that you will greatly miss the benefit of a judgement which you obviously do not value highly. What I most sincerely hope is that neither you nor Cimmie will allow our political differences to interfere with a friendship which I think we all do value a good deal and which has survived sterner tests than this.

Yours ever
Bob

Events now happened fast. 1931 was the year which Arnold Toynbee called 'annus terribilis' in which 'men and women all over the world were seriously contemplating and seriously discussing the possibility that the Western system of society might break down and cease to work'. In January there were five million unemployed in Germany,

between six and seven million in the USA, and two and a half million in Great Britain. Old political alignments were in any event cracking up. It so happened that the height of Tom's reputation and belief in himself as an almost magically potent political figure coincided exactly with the moment of twentieth-century history at which it was felt that in the face of almost certain chaos new and indeed almost magical leadership was called for. For once, Tom's natural impatience seemed undeniably suited to events. On February 4th Cimmie told Harold Nicolson that 'Tom is about to form a New Party'. On 20th February six members of the 'New Labour Group' who had signed the *Mosley Manifesto* decided to resign from the labour Party: these were Tom and Cimmie, John Strachey, W. J. Brown, Oliver Baldwin and Robert Forgan. This was the decisive moment in Tom's political life. All his political manoeuvrings up till now had been, however arrogantly or recklessly, still within the terms of some recognised political game: even his resignation from the government, his narrow defeat at the Party Conference, had in fact seemed to enhance his prestige. But if he resigned from the Labour Party itself (he had already resigned from the Conservatives) and formed his own party, he would be putting himself outside any known game.

It was agreed that the six MPs who were to resign should do so on different days to ensure the maximum publicity. Strachey and Baldwin resigned; and then Cimmie, on March 3rd. Ramsay MacDonald replied to her letter:

5th March 1931 10 Downing Street.
Whitehall.

My dear Lady Cynthia,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 3rd instant, resigning your membership of the Labour Party. Had it not been announced days ago in the newspapers, I should have been surprised, but I am interested to be put in possession of your considered reasons for the step which you have taken. Needless to say I am very sorry.

When you came in a year or two ago we gave you a very hearty welcome and assumed that you knew what was the policy of the predominant Socialist Party in this country, and that, with that knowledge, you asked us to accept you as a candidate and to go to your constituency and assist you in your fight. You are disappointed with us; you have been mistaken in your choice of political companions, and you are re-selecting them so as to surround yourself with a sturdier, more courageous and more intelligent Socialism for your

encouragement and strength. You remain true, while all the rest of us are false. Whoever examines manifestos and schemes and rejects them, partly because they are not the sort of Socialism that any Socialist has ever devised, or because they amount to nothing but words, is regarded by you as inept or incompetent. We must just tolerate your censure and even contempt; and, in the spare moments we have, cast occasional glances at you pursuing your heroic role with exemplary rectitude and stiff straightness to a disastrous futility and an empty sound. We have experienced so much of this in the building up of the Party that we must not become too cynical when the experience is repeated in the new phase of its existence. Perhaps before the end, roads may cross again and we shall wonder why we ever diverged.

Yours very sincerely,
J. Ramsay MacDonald

P.S. This is not an official reply, as I am waiting for all the resignations to be in before I decide whether to publish anything, so I mark it as a purely personal communication which is not to be published.

Cimmie also received a letter from the chairman of her constituency committee, who told her – 'Whilst I have always felt you were sincere in your desire to improve the lot of the people, I think your secession from the Labour Party is a bad let-down for all those who worked so wholeheartedly for you in your contest.'

Tom, in the middle of all this, suddenly became ill: he retired to bed in his flat in Ebury Street with pleurisy and double pneumonia. W. J. Brown was also stricken: just before it was his turn to resign, the trades-union that employed him, the Civil Service Clerical Association, threatened to sack him; he got cold feet. Tom got himself driven to Brown's house in an ambulance and was carried in on a stretcher. There, Tom wrote later of Brown – 'his face seemed to be pulled down on one side like a man suffering a stroke and he burst into tears ... The very few men in whom previously I had observed this phenomenon had likewise usually rather emphasised their determination and courage before they found themselves averse to getting out of a trench when the time came.' Tom had himself carried back to his ambulance. He himself never resigned from the Labour Party: on March 10th when the news of the New Party had become official, he was expelled for 'gross disloyalty'.

Tom's illness lasted four weeks. He lay in bed in his flat in Ebury Street – where the warm air at the press of a switch might waft over

him – and he ruminated, presumably, on what he had done. He had in his mind accused W. J. Brown of cowardice: he himself had seemed brave to a point of recklessness. But still, it was now Cimmie and John Strachey who were left to launch the New Party in the planned programme of speeches round the country. Tom had had faith in his rôle as hero: but there was evidence, as there had been before, that accidents happen to heroes at decisive moments of their histories; that it is more than will-power that decides who, and in what in what way, in fact gets out of a trench when the time comes.

CHAPTER 18

The Riddle of the Sphinx

The word 'hero' may seem ambiguous in relation to Tom. In common use it refers to someone of slightly superhuman qualities: it also has the suggestion of tragedy or death, or of someone who never quite grows up.

Tom had probably not set out to put himself beyond the rules of the political game, but there seems to have been something in him that would inevitably have done this. Heroes are fought or followed because of an air of inevitability about them: they achieve what is set out for them not by will, but by becoming legendary.

The next two years were the central ones in Tom's life and the last in Cimmie's. Tom did almost seem to be (as other 'heroes' have said of themselves) sleepwalking. He is remembered at this time as someone whom people 'fawned on': he continued to be attacked with violence: he also was increasingly ignored. People did not seem quite to know what attitude to take to him. It was as if a guerrilla fighter had appeared on a football field.

At the end of his life Tom was like Oedipus at Colonus – 'beyond the pale' in the sense of his seeming to have broken some fundamental rule which had rendered him taboo. The taboo was not on account of his having made a mistake or chosen evil: it was the penalty for some falseness attendant on possible success. Oedipus, in the myth, becomes an outcast not just because he has murdered his father and married his mother: he has assumed a false mantle of omnipotence, having solved the riddle of the Sphinx.

In the legend, after having unknowingly killed his father on the road to Thebes, Oedipus is challenged by the mythical monster the Sphinx. The Sphinx is part woman and part lion and part bird: she is that which devours people who travel hopefully: she is laying siege to the city of

Thebes, whose citizens are starving. The Sphinx will not let anyone pass unless they answer a riddle. The riddle is childish: it seems that anyone might answer it, but they do not.

The riddle is – What has four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening. Oedipus answers the riddle – a man. Whereupon the Sphinx, instead of devouring him, throws herself over a cliff. Oedipus goes on his way and becomes the saviour of the city of Thebes.

What Oedipus saw in the solving of the riddle was that the Sphinx was playing a game with words: in two instances the word 'legs' is a metaphor; in one it is not: the words referring to time are all metaphors. The riddle was a riddle because in it metaphors and direct reference are mixed. To solve it, someone had to have the power to discriminate between the two.

The people who had not been able to solve the riddle had not been accustomed to see what is a metaphor and what is not: they used words in such a way that they did not question how they used them. So they were trapped by words: they could not break out. And Thebes was starving.

Oedipus had the power of discrimination: he could stand back from words: he could see some words are metaphors and others are not. He lifted the curse from the city of Thebes. But he was left with a false impression of omnipotence.

In the myth, he was crowned King of Thebes: he married Queen Jocasta. But then another curse came down – perhaps even worse than the first. There was a plague attendant on the city being ruled by someone who seemed to have magical powers; who had also, although unwittingly, and although people did not see this at the time, murdered his father and married his mother. Oedipus had solved the riddle of the Sphinx: what he had not solved – in fact what he had landed himself with – was the problem of someone who, when he has power over words, thinks he has power over himself and over reality.

Oedipus learned that he had overreached himself: he had solved a riddle about what were and were not games: he had thought that thus he could control reality. But in fact he had become trapped unconsciously at a deeper level: people cannot get away, ultimately, from the power of the rules of games. He had murdered his father and married his mother: this was a curse within himself; he might have had the wit to see it, if he had not been so carried away by his feelings of omnipotence.

A power to see what is games-playing and what is not is only a first

step in coming to terms with reality. There is the further step, perhaps made possible by the first, which is to do not with the illusion that one is above the rules of games but with seeing the new patterns and even rules that are opened up by the fact that one can see patterns.

There are superficial parallels between the stories of Oedipus and of Tom: these are not the most interesting. Tom was the son of a bullying father whom he hardly saw and by whom he was rejected and of an adored and adoring mother who called him her 'man-child'. All this indeed when he was a child might have given him feelings of omnipotence: he could play upon his mother who seemed to be his world; there was no father to instil in him knowledge of limits imposed by morals and tradition. With such a background, a child might well have contempt for the rules of games.

What is of deeper interest is the way in which Tom seems to have come mythically towards his city of Thebes in which people were starving. In England, the plague was unemployment: there was some riddle that could not be solved not because a solution was too difficult, but because it was outside the usual terms of people's minds. Of course unemployment could be solved: a leader could say – You will be employed in this way or that or you will be shot. Most people did not think of this solution because it did not seem relevant: it might work, but they assumed it would be worse than the curse. But they could not quite say this, because it would seem they were not interested in solving unemployment – which they were. And so they said nothing. And they were devoured. And the city starved. The riddle was not solved not because it was too difficult, but because it was too undesirably easy. But what was also unpalatable was the fact that in that case perhaps the only solution was that there was no solution – one had to learn how to live with the curse.

Tom came along with his impressions of omnipotence and said – Of course you cannot solve the riddle if you stick to your customary attitudes of mind; but outside these, the solution is quite simple. The fact that you do not want to consider it means that not solving the riddle is in fact your game: you talk and do nothing about it. If you did, your game would be over: but this is your plague. If you want to cure unemployment then you have to pay the price: if you do not want to pay the price then you do not want to cure unemployment. This is a matter of logic: words refer to reality. If you really want to cure unemployment, then follow me. But you must step out of the rules of the game.

But then, Tom was trapped by the forces of a game on a deeper level,

of which he was unconscious. He felt that he could order the world as he ordered words. But he could not step back from himself, as he had stepped back from words, and see what was the nature of human beings – in what ways they might need games-playing, even if there were ways they might not. He could not do this because he could not see what were needs, and helplessnesses, as opposed to powers, within himself.

Oedipus is forced to see that however clever he has been with his power and with his words, he has not been clever with himself – he has not been clever enough to see the riddles that he has been landed with by his own nature and his own history – not to solve them, because perhaps they are insoluble – but just to see them and learn to live with them. He has simply been clever enough, in fact, to think he can ignore all this; and so his power turns to ashes. At the illuminating crisis of his life he blinds himself; as if in some recognition of his failure to see. This does not mean that he is not a legendary hero. People are legends just because they can give light to others: they can still alter the way people think.

Tom, as he lay on his bed in Ebury Street plagued with fever, must have had some archetypal dreams and visions about all this. He had seen how much of what politicians said was rubbish: how everyone knew it was rubbish but carried on as if they did not know this: thus they suffered from plague. If you pointed this out to them their minds seemed to go blank: it was as if they were at home in the plague. Tom thought he could free them by discrimination, by reason; but then what was he freeing them into? On some level Tom must have known (or when people faced him with this did his mind go blank?) that you cannot have politics without paradoxes, riddles: there are always enigmas about authority and freedom: this is just what the business of power is like. It cannot be helped if it is like a plague from time to time: if you think you can do away with paradoxes, you bring down a worse curse. In the activities of power you are dealing with other people: if other people are to be respected then there have to be rules of games: if there are not, then other people are not respected. If you do want to respect people the highest emphasis cannot be on 'losing' or 'winning': losing is a lesser disaster than that of destroying the game. You only want to destroy the game if your feelings of omnipotence give you contempt for other people.

Tom claimed that he was involved in no game: that he could order reality. With this confidence he both did and did not deceive other people: he made them feel at moments it might be true. A more interesting question is, how much he deceived himself.

In his relationship with Cimmie he had always been ruthless with words: he used them without much relevance to what they might mean. He manipulated tenderness in order to keep her: he used rages in order to get away. But also, the tenderness and the rages happened naturally: his manipulations were efforts to make the best of what was there. All this involved some ability to stand back from the forces that were driving him: if he could use them, he was not quite at their mercy. What he lacked perhaps was an ability consciously to see himself doing this – and to see where his ability to manipulate might lead him. In fact, he was involved in some circle in that the more he succeeded the more he failed – his endearments placated Cimmie but made her not trust him: in the end he did not keep her and was desolate when he failed. He might have learned something of all this if he had not himself been so involved in the game of saying that in public life he was not games-playing.

Once or twice during the next two years Tom does seem to have thought about giving up politics – at least for a time. He said he wanted to relax; to think. If he had, what he might have learned was that the most successful way of dealing with riddles and paradoxes is perhaps to enjoy them; to savour them; not to dream that they are not there or can be eliminated. Then, perhaps, one can accept what is possible and what is not. Tom had an instinct about this in his private life: but people are victims of their talents – and circumstances. In public life he had enormous talent for histrionics; and this was a time when people were seizing on people like Tom and offering them power – or at least acclaim. It was in public life that he became a victim.

Cimmie was the one person who might have influenced him in all this – to learn something about himself. But Cimmie, in spite of glimpses every now and then of their both being taken over by forces stronger than themselves, herself was trapped by circumstances and her nature – not so much by the usual traps of class or money, as by the additional facets of her background which had made her believe that she was someone exceptional and thus too proud to believe for long in forces stronger than herself. Cimmie had realised she was apt to see Tom as a saint or a devil: a hero or a baby: that so long as she saw him thus he could make use of her: perhaps she wanted to be so used. But neither Tom nor Cimmie seemed to want to learn to treat the other as an ordinary human being. With Tom there was the baby-talk: with Cimmie the appreciation of this because thus she might feel he was her baby. If she challenged him he might become raging and dash off: but then in need, he might return to her. In a marriage a husband and wife either hold a mirror up to each other so that they can see themselves (this

is rare) or each provide food for the other's fantasies. Tom perhaps felt safe through his power to hurt Cimmie: Cimmie in turn could say, almost cheerfully, 'I could die for you' or 'I could kill you'. She sometimes saw the irony of this and could say – 'What a farce!' But for all her life-giving qualities she had less and less enjoyment from the farce. She did not so often see things as she said she wanted to see them – as 'fun'.

Tom, with part of him, always did manage to see things as 'fun': he had an enormous zest for life; a talent for enjoyment. This is what made him personally, in spite of the distaste often engendered by his politics, so attractive to people – and a survivor. People loved to be with him: it was on this level that his life succeeded: he did become a happy old man; a legend. He could not of course easily accept this as his fate: part of his legend was, that politics were the whole of life to him. In some way it was probably his zest for life – even his sexual drives – that helped to render him politically ineffectual: politics are a boring game, requiring that other people should feel safe in one's presence. Tom, with the cutting-edge of his personality, seemed often to be almost knowingly self-destructive. But then – might he not in truth have wanted to become a legend – thus embracing the paradoxes he said he wanted to deny?

When Tom talked about wholeness or 'Ganzheit' this was for him not a matter of conscious integration but of balancing bits of his life at opposite ends of a pole as it were, while he stayed on a tightrope. Much of his contempt, his vituperation, was channelled into his politics: here he had no patience, no forbearance: he loved a fight. But then in private life there was room for open-mindedness, wit, laughing at himself, hilarity. People used to feel what marvellous company he was. He also, of course – again perhaps because of his sexual drives – hurt them.

One of his favourite quotations were the lines from Goethe's *Faust* where Faust makes his bargain with the devil – if the devil can show him a moment of such delight that he, Faust, will cry out for time to stop, then he, the devil, can claim Faust for his own. Tom would roll out this quotation at the dinner table like someone making a strike at skittles. He loved the sound of this; though he felt perhaps that he himself would be too hard-headed to utter Faust's cry: he might have hoped both to get the moment, and to trick the devil.

Cimmie did not want trickery: did not want balancing acts: she wanted wholeness in the sense of being all-of-a-piece and without guile. At least, she thought this was what she wanted. She made resolutions: she struggled: but then, when the resolutions failed, she did not learn:

she just made them, and the same mistakes, again. This wore away her faith in Tom: but why did she have this faith? From the first, she seems to have known what he was like. It was just his complexity, perhaps, that she had come to feel might contain her; that would give her simplicity something grand that she might attach herself to. She had written as a schoolgirl of her feeling of the necessity of a 'Big Solemn Comprehensive Idea'. And perhaps Tom had needed her simplicity to give him a thread through the maze of life. But then, he also now used her like some of his skittles to be knocked down. And then he could come for forgiveness and be comforted again. And she would feel reassured. This was their game. By staying in it, Cimmie in some sense colluded. But she got tired. Perhaps it is always a matter of luck how people do, or do not, get out.

In politics, Tom went on thinking that if you put a rational case to people you had done your job: they either followed or they did not. There was a real sense in which Tom was not interested in power – 'he was a complete professional in everything except the winning of power' (Robert Skidelsky). It was this that rendered him powerless, but also established the legend: in the circumstances this was actually a virtue. Beatrice Webb wrote of him 'He lacks genuine fanaticism: I doubt whether he has the tenacity of a Hitler'. At a slightly later date than the time to do with this book Tom wrote a letter to Lord Beaverbrook in which he himself said, in effect, that Britain was fortunate in having a fascist leader such as himself because another leader might have been more ruthlessly and successfully interested in power. Tom was capable of such irony: though not often, it is true, in politics. Trotsky, in his diary-entry about Cimmie, had called Tom a coxcomb; but there is something in Trotsky's history and character that is similar to Tom's: both men turned away, at crucial moments, from their chance to exercise power; they did this because they had some instinct about their ideals – or about their legends. Trotsky in his autobiography said the reason why he did not make a serious bid for power in Russia after Lenin's death was because he could not face the boring and squalid day-to-day procedures necessary for power: he too became ill (he got cold feet, literally, while duck shooting).

If Tom could not laugh at himself in public it was because he had put himself up on a stage and you cannot laugh at yourself on a stage or you destroy the illusion. Laughter is a sort of safety-valve which stops energy running away with itself: there is inevitably something self-destructive about people who cannot laugh. But legends are often to do with people who risk being self-destructive. Tom had a chance of power at a time

when ideas and policies such as his were succeeding extravagantly in other parts of the world: these policies, and ideas, destroyed themselves at an enormous cost of human suffering. Tom never got off the ground as it were in the matter of causing much political human suffering: he had the private wit to see that his destructiveness remained largely symbolic.

Cimmie, like Tom, imagined she wanted outward life to be orderly: she did not have his sense of curiosity when it was not. She felt passionately: but she feared a lack within her: she blamed it on her relationship with Tom. She said that she could not change unless he changed: but it was not he who felt there had to be change to survive.

Neither Cimmie nor Tom had religion: Tom had faith in himself: Cimmie had faith in Tom. Then when she lost it, she seemed to have nothing. They both, in the way they saw things, thought that life should respond to their will: they both saw death as some sort of let-out. But Tom, knowing the complexities of things, was using a metaphor when he talked about 'going down fighting'. Cimmie did not see life as a metaphor: perhaps, if she could not find faith in herself, she felt death as a condition in which humans might at last be all all-of-a-piece.

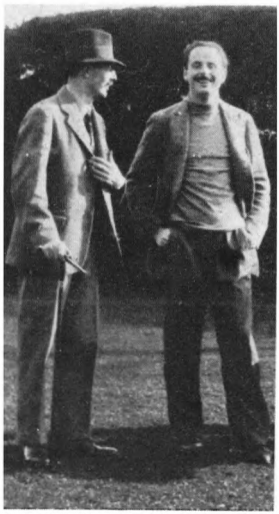
The family bathing at Savehay Farm

Cimmie's victory at Stoke, 1929

Ramsay MacDonald writing the Labour Party manifesto in the loggia at Savehay Farm, 1929

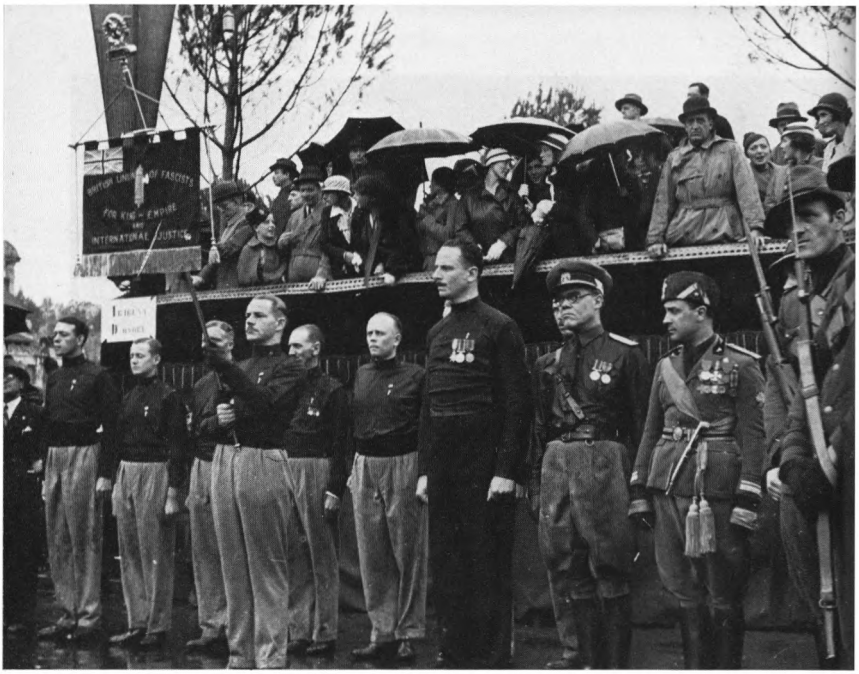
Tom fencing

Nicholas catching tiddlers



At Savehay Farm, 1930: Nicholas, Vivien, W.E.D. Allen and child, W.J. Brown, Countess Karoli, Aneurin Bevan; (right) Tom with Harold Macmillan

Venice, 1932: Cimmie, Tom Mitford, Doris Castlerosse, Diana Guinness, Tom



Rome, April 1933: Tom and (top right) Cimmie at the March Past

Last picture of Cimmie with her children; in the Rose Garden, May 1933

CHAPTER 19

The New Party

The New Party, which Tom started in March 1931, lasted for less than a year. It did not attract the number of people Tom had hoped for, and it failed dramatically and almost ridiculously: but the people most concerned did not seem to mind its failure, they appeared to see it as some sort of clearing-ground from which they could move on.

While Tom lay ill with pleurisy it was left to Cimmie and John Strachey and Oliver Baldwin (who in fact called himself an Independent) to launch the New Party: they undertook the speaking tour round the country which had been arranged for Tom. The *Manchester Guardian* commented 'Lady Cynthia contributes intensity, Mr Strachey states the case, and Mr Oliver Baldwin provides comic relief'. The 'case' was that set out in the *Mosley Manifesto* of a few months earlier: it was elaborated in yet another pamphlet under the signatures of Allan Young, John Strachey, W. J. Brown and Aneurin Bevan. The latter allowed his name to remain on the pamphlet although he had not resigned from the Labour Party. The pamphlet, entitled 'A National Policy', went into greater detail about the administrative machinery it advocated for putting its policy (or indeed any policy) into effect.

> In general Parliament must be relieved of detail. Its essential function must be to place in power an Executive Government of the character to be decided upon by the nation at the last election; to maintain it in power until and unless it commits some action which in the opinion of Parliament is deserving of censure; in that event to turn it out by way of direct Vote of Censure and appeal to the Electorate...
>
> It is essential that a small inner Cabinet Committee consisting of five or six men should be formed... This proposal has been described as an attempt to set up five Dictators. No accusation could be more

> inept. There is nothing either more or less democratic about entrusting the ultimate responsibility for the decision of the Government to a Cabinet of five men who are free from all other work than entrusting them as at present to a Cabinet of twenty men who are too busy to give real consideration to their most vitally important decisions...
>
> Broadly we say to the Electorate: Choose whatever Government you like. But when you have chosen it, for heavens sake let it get on with the job without being frustrated and baffled at every turn by a legislative and administrative procedure designed for the express purpose of preventing things being done...

Cimmie and John Strachey and Oliver Baldwin delivered this message round the country: they attracted audiences of several thousands: but they found that they were increasingly heckled, and that sometimes their meetings were broken up by what appeared to be organised gangs of Labour militants and Communists. The communist paper *The Daily Worker* was in fact already referring to the New Party as 'fascist': the militants were behaving with the special fury of people who feel they have been betrayed by their old heroes. But the New Party, if it was to get anywhere, depended on public meetings: it had little time to build up an organisation that would be accepted to deal with the crisis.

Tom lay in bed with a temperature of a hundred and five. He wrote to Harold Nicolson 'The illness has been a strange blow of fate – the first serious collapse of my life, and what a moment!' At the end of March he went with Cimmie to recuperate at Lord Beaverbrook's villa in the South of France. Also with them was his sister-in-law Baba, who herself had been seriously ill after the birth of twins and had been recuperating with Tom and Cimmie at Savehay Farm.

Up till now Tom had had the naive and presumably Marxist idea that an appeal to reason could always if necessary be made over the heads of a stupid Cabinet, a cowardly Parliamentary Labour Party and even a hysterical Party Conference, to an enlightened proletariat who in some way would be a fair judge. Marxists had to think this because if they did not – knowing as they did their non-proletarian colleagues – what hope was there for reason? But now if this belief was to go or be rendered ineffectual – if really it was members of the proletariat who were shouting down or allowing to be shouted down the reasonable exposition of New Party policy – what was there left?

Tom had, perhaps, been preparing for something like this. He had for long been perfecting his techniques as a mob orator: he seems consciously to have faced questions about the limitations of rationality

and the fact that the exercise of power is perhaps always to do with manipulations of emotion. Rationality puts a burden on people by asking them to think for themselves; it is apt to make them feel inadequate. The manipulation of emotion achieves some sort of power by making people feel that they belong.

It was remarked that Tom was different when he emerged from his sick bed: he was less patient; it was as if he had personally come to terms with having stepped outside the rules of games. The first big test of the New Party was to be at a by-election at Ashton-under-Lyne in Lancashire on April 30th 1930. Allan Young was standing as the New Party candidate. Tom had played no part in the run-up to the election: the brunt of the day-to-day electioneering had been borne by Cimmie. Jack Jones, a left-wing orator hired by the New Party at five pounds a week, wrote of Cimmie at the time:

> Cynthia Mosley was both able and willing. With me she must have addressed at least a score of very big outdoor crowds during the campaign, and also scores of 'in our street' talks to women. Whilst others in the first flight were looking important in the presence of reporters, or talking about the holding of the floating Liberal vote, the cornering of the Catholic vote, and preparing their speeches for the well-stewarded big meetings indoors each evening, Cynthia Mosley was out getting the few votes that were got.

Tom appeared on the scene six days before the election. His presence had an electrifying effect. He addressed an indoor meeting of six or seven thousand. Harold Nicolson reported:

> Tom then gets up to make his speech and profits enormously by a few interruptions from Labour supporters. He challenges Arthur Henderson to meet him tomorrow in open debate and this stirs the audience to enthusiasm and excitement. Having thus broken the ice, he launches on an emotional oration on the lines that England is not yet dead and that it is for the New Party to save her. He is certainly an impassioned revivalist speaker, striding up and down the rather frail platform with great panther steps and gesticulating with a pointing, and occasionally a stabbing, index; with the result that there was a real enthusiasm towards the end and one had the feeling that 90% of the audience were certainly convinced at the moment.

Harold Nicolson was a newcomer to politics. He had just resigned from

the diplomatic service and was working as a journalist on the *Evening Standard*. He had been attracted to the New Party, he said, out of '(1) Personal affection and belief in Tom: (2) A conviction that a serious crisis was impending and that our economic and parliamentary system must be transformed if collapse were to be avoided.' He got carried along by the sense that Tom engendered of being in touch with great events; also by the sense of fun.

Another leading figure in the New Party was Peter Howard, captain of the England Rugby Football team. Harold Nicolson wrote to Cimmie 'Peter Howard I have a feeling is bowled over by your charms – but so are we all'. Peter Howard had organised a group of young men from Oxford to protect New Party meetings: these were referred to in the press as 'Mosley's Biff Boys' or 'strapping young men in plus fours'. The emphasis of the New Party was on youth: a journalist wrote of the party headquarters at Ashton-under-Lyne – 'Young men with fine foreheads and an expression of faith dash from room to room carrying proof-sheets and manifestos: I have seldom seen so many young people so excited and so pleased'.

When the election results were announced the Conservatives had got 12,420 votes, Labour 11,005, and Allan Young of the New Party 4,472 – just saving his deposit. This result was not discreditable to a party only two months old but it was not as good as Tom had hoped: he found, as he was so often to find later, that the enthusiasm he engendered as a one-man-band did not effectively last until his audience went to the poll. But it had lasted long enough, Labour supporters imagined, for the intervention of the New Party to have ensured that the Conservatives won what had previously been held to be a safe Labour seat. In fact, the New Party's intervention had probably somewhat lessened what was a general swing against Labour throughout the country. But political crowds want scapegoats, not analysis.

The crowd of Labour militants outside the Town Hall shouted for vengeance. Tom, standing on the steps, turned to John Strachey and said 'That is the crowd that has prevented anyone doing anything in England since the war'. John Strachey commented – 'At that moment British Fascism was born: at that moment of passion, and of some personal danger, Mosley found himself almost symbolically aligned against the workers.' Tom himself commented later that what he had meant was that 'dedicated agents and warriors of communism always play on the anarchy inherent on the Left of Labour to secure confusion, disillusion and ultimately the violence which is essential to their long term plan'.

In the Town Hall, Tom arranged for Cimmie to be smuggled out

of a back door; then, in the face of the crowd which in Jack Jones's words 'had all the appearances of an American lynching crowd', Tom – 'white with rage, not fear' – led his small party through the mob 'howling at him and calling him names'. He 'smiled contemptuously' at them. Jack Jones added – 'An exciting experience it was.' Tom, to Jack Jones's apparent surprise, seemed 'almost cheerful'.

Through the summer discussions went on amongst the New Party leaders – there was an Executive Committee that met almost daily in offices in Great George Street – not so much about policy, as about what was to be done about the difficulty of getting the policy heard. Labour militants did not deny the attacks were organised: the hostility was not discouraged by Tom's old parliamentary colleagues: A. V. Alexander referred to the 'traitorous Mosley'; Emmanuel Shinwell to 'Brutus ... responsible for "the stiletto in the back".' Young men who had come fresh into the New Party wanted to build up a Youth Movement into a force that would be trained to defend the speakers against physical attack: John Strachey and others continued to be alarmed at this. They agreed that it was right that meetings should be protected from organised disruption, but they feared that a group of young men trained in judo and boxing for this purpose would grow into a proto-fascist defence force. Also they seemed to feel that demonstrations by workers, however suspect, were in some way sacrosanct. But it was difficult to see how one could have the protection without the discipline. The activists seemed to have logic on their side: the intellectuals an instinct.

Everything depended of course on what sort of balance was struck between the two; or rather what sort of skill Tom had in appearing to control or to embrace the two. He announced that in the light of the violence directed against Cimmie during her speaking tour earlier in the year a body of young men would indeed be trained; but they would 'rely on the good old English fist.'

During summer there were weekends at which the intellectuals exercised their conundrums. In Hampstead, John Strachey, Harold Nicolson and Cyril Joad debated – What happens to the New Party, which is dedicated to dealing with a crisis, if the crisis does not come? Harold Nicolson suggested that the party should continue with a programme advocating 'Sacrifice, Discipline, Service, Courage and Energy of Thought'. Cyril Joad asked – 'But how can *we* put over such a programme?' At Savehay Farm there was a congress at which John Strachey delivered his 'good old Marxian speech' (Jack Jones); Tom spoke 'soulfully of the Corporate State of the future' and 'a young man called Winckworth called for a revival of the Attic Spirit' which would

involve the New Party in attracting people with 'the heads of thinkers on the bodies of athletes'. Cyril Joad riposted 'Be careful you don't attract people with the heads of athletes on the bodies of thinkers'. Tom appreciated the wit: but he would have wished, as usual, to cut through the riddles. During the Congress at Savehay Farm, Harold Nicolson recorded – 'The Youth Movement swam'.

In a speech at the Cannon Street Hotel, in London, on June 30th 1931, Tom announced that his movement was trying to create 'a new political psychology, a conception of national renaissance, of new mankind and of vigour'. John Strachey and Allan Young were in the audience: they decided to make a positive show of their alarm. The next day Strachey addressed a meeting of the Youth Movement and spoke against the idea of any disciplined use of violence to counteract violence: a version of his statement appeared in the *Daily Herald*. At the next meeting of the New Party Executive Tom (according to Harold Nicolson) 'reprimands Strachey in terms which, if addressed to me, would have caused the most acute embarrassment'. But Harold Nicolson went on – 'I do not deny that I was impressed by the force of discipline in Tom's speech. It is quite evident that he will allow no independence to any member of the party and that he claims an almost autocratic position. I do not myself object to this, since if we are to be the thin end of the wedge we must have an extremely sharp point and no splinters. I wonder, however, how long other members of the Council will tolerate such domination.' And later – 'I think that Tom at the bottom of his heart really wants a fascist movement'.

One of the hopes that Tom was playing with at this time was that he, and some of his party, might be able to join Churchill and Lloyd George in making up a 'National Opposition' if, in the face of the continuing economic crisis, a National Government was formed by MacDonald and Baldwin. Tom drove to Archibald Sinclair's house to have talks with Lloyd George: on the way he told Harold Nicolson that he thought that Allan Young and John Strachey would be soon leaving the New Party: he said this with little regret. He called them the 'pathological element' – apparently because of their timidity in the face of violence. (Tom used to tease John Strachey by telling him he was 'governed by Marx from the waist up and Freud from the waist down.') Nothing much came of the talks with Lloyd George. Everyone on the fringes of power seemed to be trying to charm everyone else, and to be waiting to see what would happen. Perhaps no one, in the face of the frightening prospects of 1931, really wanted power.

John Strachey then produced a memorandum in which he advocated

making 'a progressive break with that group of powers of which France and the USA are leaders' and entering into 'close economic relations with the Russian government'. This was a direct challenge to Tom, to test his left-wing or right-wing commitment. There was also a dispute in the New Party Executive about unemployment benefit: it seemed to John Strachey and Allan Young that Tom was not taking a strong enough stand against proposed government cuts. Tom made concessions here: but he rejected Strachey's pro-Russian proposals since they 'contradicted directly the whole basis of the policy we have long agreed together'. Then John Strachey and Allan Young resigned.

They prepared a joint letter to be made public: but each wrote privately to Tom.

July 22nd 1931 7 North Street.
Westminster.

Deâr Tom,

I think you will agree that the differences between us which have become apparent during recent meetings are too serious to be left where they are. In fact they are really so wide as to make argument impossible. It is quite clear to me that your whole outlook is becoming more and more Conservative: already you regard any other outlook as 'pathological'.

In these circumstances further collaboration between us would be nothing but a handicap to both of us. So I send you my resignation from the New Party and its Council.

I intend making this resignation public tomorrow unless you want to talk about it first. If you do ring me up tomorrow morning at North St (Vic 3681) But I don't see what purpose will be served by such a talk – and frankly I dread it. One can't have worked as closely with and for anyone as I have tried to work with and for you ever since I came into politics, and not feel pretty smashed up by such a separation.

We have obviously quite different conceptions of what the New Party ought to be and of how it could succeed. Naturally it seems to me that it is you who have changed. No doubt you feel that it is I who have changed. What more is there to say? – except for me to thank you very genuinely for all the kindness and I believe affection you have shown me.

Yours
John

22nd July 1931 as from – 10 Brookland Rise
N.W. 11

Dear Tom,

... Since your illness and the Ashton bye-election there has been a change in your whole attitude of mind which has disturbed me more than I can say. Your semi-public and private statements with regard to the Youth Movement, India, Unemployment Insurance, Russia, and the general function and purpose of the New Party has made me ashamed of my own association with it. Our difficulties in launching the party were due to the doubts and suspicions of our friends that you would succumb to the pressure and attraction of right-wing views. I contested this strongly at the time – placing reliance on your strength and judgement. Your attitude in the last two months seems to have proved me wrong and the critics right. From the beginning I have been aware of the dangers implicit in a movement such as ours. These dangers could only have been avoided by a leadership above suspicion as far as working-class interests were concerned. You have not given us that leadership but rather have provided grounds for the suspicion that the party would become Hitlerist, Fascist, and ultimately anti-working class. I cannot be associated with a party which is even open to that suspicion, and I now tender you my resignation.

I will always remember with gratitude your kindness to me. But I must pursue the course which my conscience and intelligence dictates.

Yours,
Allan Young

Tom got in touch with Harold Nicolson who was working at the *Evening Standard* and asked him to go round to see John Strachey and Allan Young and to try to get them at least to postpone the public announcement of their resignation which was to be made at six o'clock that evening. Harold Nicolson did not manage to get in touch with them till 5.30 – they were apparently in hiding – then he found them in John Strachey's house, where:

> Allan Young descends to the dining room looking pale and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I say that Tom suggests that they should not openly resign at the moment but 'suspend' their resignation till 1st December by which date they will be able to see whether their suspicions of our fascism are in fact justified. Allan might have

> accepted this, but at that moment John Strachey enters. Tremulous and uncouth he sits down and I repeat my piece. He says that it would be impossible for him to retain his name on a Party while taking no part in that Party's affairs . . . He then begins, quivering with emotion, to indicate some of the directions in which Tom has of late abandoned the sacred cause of the workers. He says that ever since his illness he has been a different man. His faith has left him. He is acquiring a Tory mind. It is a reversion to type. He considers socialism a 'pathological condition'. John much dislikes being pathological. His great hirsute hands twitch neurotically as he explained to us, with trembling voice, how unpathological he really is.

Harold Nicolson failed to get them to withdraw or to postpone their resignations. He commented – 'Undoubtedly the defection of John and his statement that we were turning fascist will do enormous electoral harm to the party. Politically however it will place Tom in a position where with greater ease he can adhere to Lloyd George and Winston.'

Tom, however, was now only going through the motions of playing at party politics; he was dreaming more and more of the time when he, as an effective leader, might be in direct relationship to the masses which he was sure was the only way of getting anything done. Harold Nicolson recorded – 'Tom conceives of great mass meetings with loud speakers – 50,000 people at a time'. For the organisation of them, the Youth Movement would of course be vitally important. Tom drafted a farewell note to Allan Young: 'I want just to tell you how sorry I am our association has ended. It has meant more to me than most things in my life. As we go on the sorrow of things deepens'.

Harold Nicolson told Cyril Joad that he was staying on in the New Party because 'I felt it was the only party which gave to intelligence a position above possessions or the thoughts of Karl Marx'. Cyril Joad said he was leaving the party because it was about to 'subordinate intelligence to muscular bands of young men'.

At the end of July the government received the report of a committee it had set up to advise on the economic situation: the main recommendation was that unemployment benefit, already pitiful, should be cut by twenty per cent. The New Party held a rally at Renishaw Park, in Yorkshire, the home of the Sitwells, at which 40,000 people were present. Tom declared 'We invite you to something new, something dangerous'. Then politicians went on holiday.

Tom and Cimmie went, as usual, to the South of France. They left Harold Nicolson virtually in charge of the office at home. He was

making preparations for the New Party weekly newspaper, *Action*, which was to be launched in the autumn and of which he was to be editor. The New Party had based its appeal on being the party that would be ready to deal with the crisis when it came: everyone agreed it was coming and it would be the worst economic crisis for a hundred years. Tom was all his life contemptuous of people who 'even for the few years at the height of their responsibilities cannot be serious'. But the trouble was that however accurate had been his forecast of the crisis, he had succeeded in putting himself in a position in which he had no responsibility for dealing with it. Harold Nicolson wrote to him:

> I recognise that people may say that at the gravest crisis in present political history you prefer to remain upon the Mediterranean. On the other hand, I do not see what you would do were you here at this moment; and I feel that it is more dignified to be absent and aloof than to be present and not consulted.

CHAPTER 20

Politics as Farce

The extraordinary position that Tom had got himself into – that of preparing for a crisis by finding himself able to do nothing about it when it came – was the result of two major assumptions: the first, that the old parties would disintegrate in the face of the crisis so that it would be better not to be tainted by their failures of responsibility; the second, that he himself would be in charge of a party so patently free of the farcical aspects of the old parties that people would soon turn to him and give him responsibility.

The nature of the crisis had seemed to him to be simple: if the welfare of every country in the world depended on its selling more than it bought on an open world market, then in fact only those countries would succeed which could sell the cheapest goods by paying the lowest wages. It was out of the question for British workers to accept ever lower wages: so there would be crisis. This might take the form of bankruptcy or even of war – by which other countries' economic competitiveness might be broken. But for this sort of crisis too the old parties were not equipped to deal: and in any case, any party led by Tom would be dedicated to preventing war.

The success of a party run by Tom in dealing with a crisis would hinge on a body of dedicated men who would run, without the supervision of Parliament, the 'closed' economic area of Great Britain-and-Empire by means of statutory powers to control wages and prices, industrial investment, a floating exchange rate and the bulk buying of raw materials. Everything would depend on the efficient, incorruptible nature of these 'new' men: without such characteristics they would just have more power to make more muddles and to act more deviously than the old. Tom for some time had recognised this: in his *Sunday Express* article of 1930 he had suggested that no political programme such as his

could work without men of 'a hard, realistic type, hammered into existence on the anvil of great ordeal'. Now, a year later, the ordeal was here.

Half way through August an Austrian bank went bankrupt; foreign depositors called in their money from London; there was what is called 'a run on the pound'; gold reserves (Britain was still on the gold standard) were depleted; it was believed – this was contemporary economic dogma – that international 'confidence' could only be restored if there were cuts in public spending at home. This in effect meant the immediate implementation of the recommendations of the report which had advocated the cutting of unemployment benefit. A large proportion of the Labour Cabinet would not agree to this: they had however no practical alternative suggestions. Ramsay MacDonald suggested to the King that a National Government might be formed consisting of members of all parties: this would obviate everyone's tendency to wish to pass responsibility on to others. Also it might prevent Britain being forced off the gold standard; which eventuality would be, according to dogma again, a disaster. The King agreed. A general election could follow later.

The formation of a National Government under MacDonald cut from under the New Party much of the ground on which its appeal had been based – that of aiming to put in control of the country men who were above the customary game of party politics and in theory at least dedicated to the business of getting a job done. The only serious appeal that the New Party might now have against the National Government would be if it could be seen to be composed of the type of people more likely to do a job well.

Harold Nicolson had been to Manchester to interview prospective New Party candidates. He recorded in his diary:

> They vary from an old lunatic called Holden to a boy of 21 called Branstead who scarcely knows what the House of Commons is. Only one of the many we interview – a wild-eyed nymphomaniac called Miss —— is at all a possible candidate... The party has quite clearly not as yet attracted the better class of manual worker.

Slightly later Harold Nicolson reported to Tom in the South of France. His letter is dated August 13th – three days after Ramsay MacDonald had been recalled to London to face the 'run on the pound' and ten days before the public announcement of the formation of the National Government. Of the people mentioned in Harold Nicolson's letter

Sellick Davies was the New Party Treasurer, F. K. Box was the Chief Party Agent, and Dr Robert Forgan was, together with Tom and Cimmie and a recruit from the Conservatives W. E. D. Allen, one of the four remaining New Party MPs.

4 King's Bench Walk.
August 14th 1931 Temple W.C.2.

My dear Tom,

This is going to be a long letter and illegible in parts. It will also, at least at first, be a painful letter. The reason why it will be illegible is that I am using the typewriter of Mr Hamlyn, the Genera Manager of *Action*. To which I am not attuned. The reason why it will be painful is Sellick Davies. I begin with the bloody part. The rest will be cheery enough.

First the iniquities (so I am assured) of Sellick. Box rang me up today in a state of perturbation. Box was perturbed. It seems that he had received a request from Sellick who is now with the admirable Forgan at Berneval sur mer (that obscure Dieppoise resort where the unfortunate Mr Wilde retired after endurances of Reading Gaol). Sellick asked for £25 from the till. Box sent for the books. The books disclosed that Sellick had been withdrawing from from the said till sums which even to me appeared excessive. And for these sums he had provided vouchers which, although proof of his hospitable instincts, were by no means proof of his capacity as Treasurer. Box was shocked. So also, to a lesser degree, was I. I managed to convince Box that a chartered accountant such as Sellick was could scarcelz behave in such a manner unless there was some explanation. We must go careful like. Box was all for calling in other and less Welsh accountants at once. I urged him to consult you. And by this post you will receive a letter which will cause you much distress.

Anyhow we have refused to advance Sellick money for his amusements at the Dieppe Casino. And have done so in a manner which will cause him a certain uneasiness if guilty but no acute displeasure if innocent. The sums involved are not enormous. I think he has been a muddle head. But the fact remains that he is not competent to control our finances, and that som more chartered and less Welsh accountant will have to take his place.

This is unpleasant not only because we cannot face more resignations but also because Sellick has his points. Financial sensibility is obviously a rare quality and one possessed only by those who know nothing of finance...

So much for the bloody part. Now for other more cheering news. (1) The party. I find that the present crisis has enormously increased your prestige. People who treated us as a painful joke five weeks ago are now regarding us with a wild surmise. Men like Keynes are saying you were right all along. I find that 'West End Clubmen' (it is not for nothing that I spent eighteen months at the *Evening Standard*) have adopted quite a different angle towards your movement. People like Middleton Murray in this month's *Adelphi* speak openly in your favour. H. G. Wells today spoke with serious interest about the policy, and Leonard Woolf has written to me asking for full information and pamphlets. These may be straws – but they are straws in an important wind... (4) *Action*: otherwise the paper which fills all mz thoughts and most of my time. I shall not bother you with details. It is going ahead like a speed-boat. I have engaged the staff and feel they are good. Mr Hamlyn the Manager is a Jew. Mr Joseph the assistant editor may also be a Jew but his point is that he will corrct my tendency to quote Aristotle. A clever young man...

(the bore about this typewriter is that when I want to say 'Y' it sazs 'z'. The result is ungainly. 'Bz' is not a pretty rendering of the word 'by').

One more point. Would you wish to start off the paper with an article by yourself? 'HAVE I FIZZLED OUT?' seems the right note. It is not essential, but I think we should face that question and I think you can do it best. My God, Tom, if that paper is a dud then I am a dud. It WON'T BE A DUD...

I think that for once events have moved to help you. Of course the Socialists have cornered Baldwin and are taking your programme leaf by leaf like an artichoke. But that merely increases your opportunity. I find that many people are saying that you will be tempted to join any coalition that is formed. I hope you will if you consider it right to do so and if you are assured of the necessary authority. People always accuse you of being out for yourself. I reply 'Yes, thank God¾ (it is very rude to write God¾ one ought to write God just like that) – I reply 'Yes, thank God, he is one of those people who feel a we should all feel – 'l'etat c'est moir' I mean 'moi'.

Tom – it is fun being with you since you understand where my nonsense begins and where my my sense begins.

But really everying is gling very well, and if we keep faith in ur own intelligence nothing can to wrong

Yours ever
Harold.

P.S. Did you get my memorandum on Foreign Policy? I sent it by registered post but have just discovered that I wrote Villa Uzes or rods to that effect beine memerised by the memory of little bo-peep alis Miss Gordon alias Duchesse D'Uzes. But I hope it turned up all right.

To this letter, surely unique in the annals of letters from editors to newspaper proprietors, Tom, from Antibes, replied – 'It is a joy to have you on the job: do not kill yourself'.

The centre of attraction at Antibes this year (apart from Tom and Cimmie themselves: it was true that they appeared ever more glamorous politicians the further they got from the drab corridors of power) was Michael Arlen, the author of *The Green Hat*, whom Tom, according to Irene, so inspired with New Party propaganda over dinner at Monte Carlo that he, Michael Arlen, considered becoming a party member. Life at Antibes went its usual way: Tom was pursuing someone called Lotsie: I, aged eight, was bitten on the head by a pet monkey: people 'massed again, booted and spurred, and in a relay of cars departed to the dirty pictures at Nice and on to Monte' (Irene).

The history of the New Party is crucial to an understanding of Tom: he stayed in the South of France because he had announced that party politics were absurd: he was acting logically according to his convictions. Even if he had had anything to do with the crisis he would have felt it better to wait, probably, until people turned to him; only then would he feel he had a mandate to put what was required into effect. And was it not the case, as people told him, that his legendary prestige was increasing so long as he remained aloof? But the question remained – what use, in the end, could he make of this prestige?

The affairs of the New Party went their own bizarre way. Dr Robert Forgan wrote from Berneval-sur-Mer:

Dear Tom,

Recent public events in England have more than justified the cry of 'crisis' that we raised so long before anyone else... unfortunately I have a crisis of my own. Ever since – imprudently or at least improvidently – I entered Parliament two years ago (and gave up moderately lucrative medical work) I have been in financial difficulties... I took to borrowing at ruinous rates of interest until now I find myself in such a mess that I must get the ground cleared somehow... Just at the moment the New Party can ill afford to lose another Member of Parliament...

There followed the request for a loan of £500. The letter ended somewhat disarmingly – 'Superintending the earth is, for me, far more interesting than keeping one's affairs in order!'

Tom arrived back from Antibes on 26 August, two days after the formation of the National Government. Harold Nicolson met him at Dover, and found him cheerful. Tom said that of course he would be pressing on with New Party plans: he hoped to get six members into the House of Commons so long as a general election did not come before February. But he recognized that it was possible the New Party might fail completely, in which case he would retire from public life for ten years. He explained – 'I have never led a civilised life at all since I entered politics as a boy. I can well afford to wait ten years, to study economics, and even then when I return I shall be no older than Bonar Law was when he first entered politics'.

In later life Tom used to say that he sometimes wished he had taken this advice to himself more literally: he knew that he was no longer interested in conventional manoeuvrings for power; he was interested in the presentation of the embodiment of an idea. For this, it was not clear how much there was urgency: what was important was the effort to formulate and give substance to the idea.

For the next four months the New Party end-game was played out to what must have been the bewilderment of a dwindling band of spectators. The first number of *Action*, edited by Harold Nicolson, came out on October 8th: it was a tabloid-sized paper of 32 pages and cost 2d. The tone was set by the first editorial: 'We have adopted certain watchwords – the first is truth: the second courage: the third intelligence: the fourth vigour.' Tom on the front page wrote 'We must create a movement which grips and transforms every phase and aspect of national life.' On the inside pages there was an article by Dr Forgan on old age ('The Commonest Disease in the Wide World') a science article by Gerald Heard ('From Faraday to Kapitza – Great Cambridge Dynamo') a gardening page by Vita Sackville West ('How To Plant And Design Beds') and book reviews of *The Waves* and *Sanctuary* by Harold Nicolson. The next few numbers contained 'Did the Werewolf Exist?' by Gerald Heard and 'Vagabond Camp – Tales of Great Journeys' by Eric Muspratt. Tom continued to emphasise the need to 'imbue the nation with a new idea and a new faith' and to insist that a 'virile group' should be returned to the House of Commons. The editor however announced as the general election approached – 'If, as is far more likely, the New Party has done extremely badly . . . the note will be one of quiet manliness; of resigned British pluck'.

Tom himself carried on powerfully as his one-man-band. On September 8th he made his last major speech in Parliament: he attacked Labour for having followed conservative policies of deflation: he advocated following Keynes's advice to borrow money to finance work for the unemployed: he perorated 'the way out is not the way of the monk but the way of the athlete... the simple question before the house... is whether Great Britain is to meet its crisis lying down or standing up.' On September 20th he was addressing a meeting of an estimated 20,000 people at Glasgow: he referred to the Labour Party as 'a Salvation Army that took to its heels on the day of Judgement': he was attacked by a communist group with razors. His bodyguard, including Peter Howard and the ex-welter-weight boxing champion Kid Lewis, fought off the attack, but a stone hit Tom on the head. (Tom used to tell the story how he had asked Kid Lewis why he had not punched more ruthlessly, and Kid Lewis had said he was afraid of killing someone). Tom's speech however had been heard through the use of loudspeakers: the meeting, Peter Howard reported, was 'really rather a success'. Afterwards Harold Nicolson noted – 'Tom says this forces us to be fascist and that we no longer need hesitate to create our trained and disciplined force. We discuss their uniforms: I suggest grey flannel trousers and shirts.' He also suggested the emblem of a marigold in the buttonhole.

Tom agreed with Harold Nicolson that it was important that the Youth Movement should not appear too military: on the other hand – 'the working class have practically no sense of being ridiculous in the way that we have, and their very drab lives gives them a thirst for colour and for drama'.

> On the whole, however, I think that Peter Howard is just the man to hold the right balance. He must see that Mr Kid Lewis is invariably accompanied on his tours by Mr Sacheverell Sitwell – in a Siamese connection they might well form the symbol of our Youth Movement!

Through Harold Nicolson and *Action* Tom was in touch with the Sitwells, the Leonard Woolfs, with other writers and artists: he was also through the Youth Movement in touch with a growing band of toughs. But the true Siamese connection existed within himself. After a wildly enthusiastic and peaceful meeting at the Free Trade Hall the *Manchester Guardian* reported –

> In his 35th year Oswald Mosley is already thickly encrusted with legend. His disposition and his face are those of a raider, a corsair ... We speak metaphorically; but who could doubt ... that here was one of those root-and-branch men who have been thrown up from time to time in the religious, political and business story of England.

Then after a meeting at the Rag Market at Birmingham, the *Birmingham Post* reported that it was the presence of the Youth Movement that 'immediately set up a militant feeling in the few who were out for trouble' with the result that there was such a fight that Tom and his bodyguard were afterwards charged with assault. They were acquitted: the magistrate agreeing with Tom's counsel's opinion about the unlikelihood of a speaker hiring a large hall for the purpose of beating up his own audience. Also prosecution witnesses were made to look ridiculous by saying that Tom's 'provocative attitude' was due to the 'smile on his face'. But the two sides of the legend were becoming established in people's minds – that of the hero and the thug.

The general election took place on October 27th. Six months ago the New Party had talked about putting up four hundred candidates: in the event it put up twenty four. All but two lost their deposits. Tom saved his, but came bottom of the poll with 10,834 votes at Cimmie's old constituency of Stoke. Harold Nicolson lost his deposit standing for the Combined Universities: Kid Lewis polled 154 votes at Whitechapel. Cimmie herself had not stood: she was said to be suffering from 'overstrain': she was also pregnant.

The New Party had been in a hopeless position in terms of practical politics at the election. It had campaigned on a programme of 'mobilising national forces to revive trade; linking up with the Dominions to help the export trade; scientific protection of the home market and a General Powers Bill to give the government powers of rapid action.' All these points with the exception of the last had been covered by the manifestos of the National Government; and there had been promises of decisive action of course too. The New Party could not even campaign as the party of opposition, because the Labour Party had broken away from Ramsay MacDonald and was itself in opposition to the MacDonald-Conservative-Liberal government. The New Party had nothing of substance to say to the electorate except that it had been the party which had foretold the crisis and that it was unlikely that the crisis would be solved by the people who had failed to prevent it.

Tom believed that the government of 'the old men who have laid waste the power and the glory of our land' would collapse within a short

time and that then politicians would be faced by more strenuous problems than those of collecting votes. This conviction was not unreasonable. Shortly before, there had been the naval mutiny at Invergordon when sailors, faced with the proposal to cut their pay by ten per cent, had refused to turn out for duty. Already the Government had had to take Britain off the gold standard – which action it had ostensibly come into existence to prevent. People other than Tom felt that ordinary structures of society were cracking up; that battles for power would soon have to be won not at elections, but in the streets.

Against this background *Action* continued on its haphazard way. After the debacle of the election (there were no details printed in it of the election results) the editor wrote 'Are we downhearted? Yes we are!' and Gerald Heard's science article was on 'Will Eels Show Us Where Lost Continents Lay?' However in the next number there was a new feature by Peter Cheyney, the crime writer, whom Harold Nicolson had described in his diary as 'a Jew fascist – a most voluble, violent and unpleasant type'. This feature was entitled 'Cutting out the Bunk in Great Britain' and it referred to the 'Nupa Youth Movement' and the 'Nupa Shock Movement' – 'Nupa' being toughened-up jargon for 'New Party'. Peter Cheyney wrote:

> In both these movements he [the young man of today] will learn realism as opposed to bunk, vibrant nationalism as opposed to sloppy internationalism, discipline as opposed to the post-war ideal of sloth, and a comradeship unknown to the Red 'comrades' of the sickly sickle . . . You will meet Nupa. It will find you in its own way. Its programme . . . aims at the establishment of a country-wide system of Nupa-Shock-Propaganda Controls by June 1933 and the completely organised Political-Shock-Youth Movement by June 1935.

Harold Nicolson's friends wrote amongst themselves in horror at this style (Raymond Mortimer to Edward Sackville West: 'When I walk in the streets and see posters – *Action* edited by Harold Nicolson – *The Prime Minister Needs Kicking* by Oswald Mosley – I desire to vomit'). But Raymond Mortimer himself still wrote an article for *Action* ('The Reasons Why I Prefer The Present'); and so did Osbert Sitwell, Peter Quennell, Christopher Isherwood, and Alan Pryce-Jones ('The World Is Neither Large Nor Remarkable'). The circulation had dropped from an initial 160,000 to 50,000 at the time of the election: by December it was under 20,000 and was losing £340 a week. There did not seem to be much point in its going on.

The last number appeared on December 31st. Harold Nicolson wrote – 'We recognise with cold calm that our failure is for the moment complete... we were too highbrow for the general public and too popular for the highbrow... The first number was a dud. We were thereafter not quick enough to reduce our printing order... (People) accused the paper of lacking punch. Perhaps they were right. Yet it is difficult to punch fairly.'

Tom on the front page wrote:

> We were never fools enough to delude ourselves into the belief that we could build a new political party of a normal character in normal conditions. We shall be a movement born of crisis and ordeal or we shall be nothing. If that crisis does not mature we shall be nothing, for the country for perfectly good reasons will not require us... In that case we can all retire more happily to more congenial occupations, satisfied that at least we have done our best to meet a menace which might have overwhelmed this country but which fortunately did not mature.

However at the end – and printed in italics as if it were being pointed out to his readers that they were being involved in some sort of change of gear – Tom launched into one of his perorations. Under the headline 'We Are Pierced and Broken – We Advance', he wrote:

> Better the great adventure, better the great attempt for England's sake, better defeat, disaster, better far the end of that trivial thing called a Political Career than stifling in a uniform of Blue and Gold, strutting and posturing on the stage of Little England, amid the scenery of decadence, until history, in turning over an heroic page of the human story, writes of us the contemptuous postscript: 'These were the men to whom was entrusted the Empire of Great Britain, and whose idleness, ignorance and cowardice left it a Spain.' We shall win; or at least we shall return upon our shields.

Tom's perorations were demonstrations of the style of his heart, of his dedication, in a more profound way perhaps than was his logic. The style was that of one who gets glory from battle: it had none of the vulgarity of Peter Cheyney's call for a Nupa Political-Shock-Youth-Movement; but the chords it touched were inevitably, if tragically, sometimes the same.

During the autumn in spite of (or because of) Tom's increasingly

apparent failure with the New Party there had been continuing moves to try to get him back into the conventional political fold. For a time the New Party MPs had sat on the Conservative benches. Then Randolph Churchill had come to see Tom on a mission from his father Winston to ask him whether he would still consider joining a band of 'Tory toughs' in opposition to the National Government. Tom had asked Randolph why Winston wanted him: Randolph had replied 'Because without you he will not be able to get hold of the young men.' (Harold Nicolson, who recorded this story, added 'Tom is very pleased with that'). Tom also had had talks with Neville Chamberlain to see whether the New Party could make some electoral deal with the National Government. But it was still obvious that Tom wanted seriously to be involved with none of these moves. Harold Nicolson wrote 'He says that it would be impossible for him to enter the "machine" of one of the older parties: that by so doing he would again have to place himself in a strait waistcoat: that he has no desire for power on those terms'. But by the end of the year the New Party had virtually ceased to exist: the office in Great George Street was closed down. One of the last manifestations of the party was, typically, the completion of a propaganda film exhorting people to join it. In the film there were shots of MPs asleep and then crowds rushing forwards shouting 'England wants Action!' The film was banned in cinemas on the grounds that it might bring Parliament into disrepute.

With part of himself Tom might well have been happy, as he had said he would be, to 'retire to more congenial occupations' while the crisis did not come to a head in the way he had expected it to. He and Cimmie were seen at a great many parties and night clubs that winter: he created excitement and interest wherever he went. He had the style of the temporarily defeated but still potentially justified hero. At the very end of 1931, after cataloguing the disasters of the year and of his association with Tom, Harold Nicolson could still write – 'yet in spite of all this, what fun life is!'

Out of all Tom's political involvement for the past thirteen years there remained only one practical manifestation – the embryonic NUPA Youth Movement. This with its 'Rugger, Cricket, Boxing, Fencing and Billiards' and 'Talks By Famous People Every Tuesday' at 122a King's Road, was the embodiment of that other part of Tom which, whatever the circumstances, would always be concerned with returning, or not, upon its shield.

CHAPTER 21

Steps to Fascism

Cimmie's practical involvement in politics virtually ceased after her efforts to launch the New Party during the spring and summer of 1931. After this she seems to have lost heart. She had written an article in the *Daily Sketch* in May – 'There is something in the very air of the House [of Commons], something indefinable, which daunts me. I think it is the thought that it does not really matter what you say, that it will have no effect on anyone at all, and that you might as well not say it.' In a letter to Tom she had written of 'the horrible dreary list of engagements and meetings at Stoke which seem 10 times worse as I am so absolutely wretched and miserable.' Almost her last public speech was at a Women's Peace Conference in June: she said 'There is only one way that people could stop war – by refusing to fight'. Harold Nicolson remarked 'Poor Cimmie cannot understand his [Tom's] repudiation of all the things he has taught her to say previously. She was not made for politics. She was made for society and the home.'

At the time of the split in the New Party John Strachey had written to Cimmie – 'To think of the inevitable separation from you is to me *by far* the worst part'. Some months later Allan Young wrote 'I want to meet you, and talk, and touch you, and feel everything is all right again'. She seemed to play a rather distant motherly role to people in the New Party. But in private life, too, there seemed to be something in her that was beginning to give up.

At Antibes in 1931 two days after Tom's return to England, Irene recorded – 'Cim drove herself home at 5.30 am and to my horror fell asleep at the wheel and hit the rocks on the hairpin bend mercifully not on the sea side'. In England, Harold Nicolson noted about Tom and Cimmie – 'They bicker as usual . . . she nags at him . . . but they are really fond of each other in spite of their infidelities'.

Cimmie wrote to Tom – 'I won't repeat any of the things I have said scores and scores of times – please remember them yourself – and I on my part will do everything I can try and think of your point of view . . . I am tired of talking. All I want is something doing, something happening.'

This was about Tom's private affairs. In public life, what Cimmie was at the moment objecting to was Tom's involvement with fascism. In December Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail*, approached Tom and said that he was prepared to put the Harmsworth press at Tom's disposal if he, Tom, succeeded in organising a disciplined movement from the remnants of the New Party. Harold Nicolson recorded – 'Cimmie, who is profoundly working-class at heart, does not at all like this Harmsworth connection. Tom pretends he was only pulling her leg. Cimmie wants to put a notice in the *Times* to the effect that she disassociates herself from Tom's fascist tendencies. We pass it off as a joke.' Also – when Tom and Harold Nicolson were talking of the approaches made by Winston Churchill and Harold Nicolson had suggested that Tom was 'destined to lead the Tory Party' – Cimmie 'who is violently anti-Tory, screams loudly'.

Cimmie was by this time five months pregnant. She had not stood again for Stoke in the general election partly out of disenchantment with politics but mainly out of fear of another miscarriage. She was not well: she was having trouble with her kidneys. But she went out a lot with Tom to parties during that autumn. They were both now out of Parliament, and there was not much else for them to do. In this area, she could still try to keep up with Tom.

She talked to Harold Nicolson about Tom – 'about his incurable boyishness and *joie de vivre*. She welcomes his fencing as it serves as a safety valve for his physical energy. That in fact is what is wrong with Tom: his energy is more physical than mental.'

Cimmie also told Harold Nicolson that as a result of the Leiter Estate lawsuit which had gone against the Curzon and Suffolk branches of the family in America, and the huge expenses incurred by the New Party, she and Tom were now 'broke'. 'Tom has lost all his money and there are huge overdrafts': they had to live now 'at a rate of £1,000 a year.' During 1932 both Savehay Farm and the house at Smith Square were let; Cimmie and the children went to live in a mews flat behind Tom's flat at Ebury Street, which had previously been occupied by their chauffeur. Reports of their losses, however, were exaggerated.

Tom had taken up fencing again: this was indeed a means of exercising his exuberant energy. It was also probably an excuse, now the House of Commons was not available to him, to be away from home at all

hours practising. At fencing he very quickly again became amazingly good. In 1932, at the age of thirty five, and with his injured leg, he was runner-up in the British épée championships. While in training for this he wrote to Cimmie:

> Tiger Boy! Clever lad!
> Army List team turned out with Epée won 2 matches drew one double hit. They asked fight foil after not having one in hand for six months. Among those he defeated 5pts to 2 Army champion and 4th in last world's championship.
> Won 2 matches with foil and lost one.
> Result 6 matches – won 4 lost 1 drew 1.
> Proud Porker. [drawing of a pig with its tail up]
> Hope after her meeting not [drawing of a downcast sheep].

Cimmie seemed to become more at ease with Tom as she advanced with her pregnancy. She had been told to rest, and she stayed at home, or sometimes went with Tom to parties. There was a fashionable craze that winter for watching all-in wrestling at the Gargoyle Club. She did not involve herself in Tom's preparations for fascism.

Harold Nicolson spelt out to Tom the dangers of fascism with a calm, warning voice like that of Bob Boothby the year before.

> I beg Tom not to get mixed up with the fascist crowd. I say that fascism is not suitable to England. In Italy there was a long history of secret societies. In Germany there was a long tradition of militarism. Neither had a sense of humour. In England anything on these lines is doomed to failure and ridicule.
>
> He answers that he will concentrate on clubs and cells within clubs; that a new movement cannot be made within the frame of a political party. I beg him to examine himself carefully and to make certain that his feelings are in no sense governed by anger, disappointment or a desire to get back on those who have let him down. I admit that disasters such as he has experienced in last year are sufficient to upset the strongest character, but I contend that the strength of his own character is to be tested by the patience and balance with which he takes the present eclipse. He says he feels no resentment: that he had expected that the effect of his defeat would be to throw him into a life of pleasure: on the contrary, he feels now bored with night clubs and more interested than ever in serious things. I say that he must now obtain a reputation for seriousness at any cost.

Before 1931 Tom does not seem to have thought much about fascism: he had been outspoken against Mussolini at the time of the invasion of Corfu: he had been in the neighbourhood of an English yacht in Venice which had been blown up by some 'festive young blackshirts'. But by 1932 Mussolini was emerging not only as someone who was giving the word 'fascism' a recognisable meaning, but as the leader of a nationalist revival about some aspects of which it was difficult for even the most sceptical politicians not to be admiring.

In the last number of *Action* it had been announced that Tom and other members of the New Party were going to visit Italy and Germany and 'probably at a later date Russia' to 'study the modern movement in all countries'. By modern movement was meant – 'new political forces born of crisis, conducted by youth and inspired by completely new ideas of economic and political organisation'. In January 1932 Tom set off for Rome: he left Cimmie behind staying with friends in the country and guarding her pregnancy. On his way he stopped off in Paris where he 'spent *reveillon* at the Fabre-Luces' and was 'kept up doing *jeux de société* till 8 am.' (Harold Nicolson). Concerning this, Tom wrote to Cimmie:

> Last night was just her party: wished she was trumpeting her instruction for the games and attendant swains . . . Much dancing in the dark: young Tommy coyly against the wall of course. Then a lovely romp at supper with little puff balls iced in champagne buckets and thrust down ladies' backs (in his mind's ear he could hear her bellows indignant if she had suffered!) Perhaps he better confess that he invented this game, which went with a real swing!

In Rome he was joined by Harold Nicolson and Christopher Hobhouse, a young recruit to the New Party. Tom and Cimmie continued to correspond while he was in Rome. In the background to their letters is the struggle between Tom's interest in fascism (what he called 'fascio') and Cimmie's continuing wariness about it (what he called 'fatio'). In the foreground is what Cimmie had called his increasing 'boyishness'.

> January 6th 1932.
>
> Darling Baby Squasher,
>
> Completed 2 days in Rome and what days – yesterday dark and gloomy – today radiant sunshine – lay nudo in his room – flooding in – real sun bath – so wished she was here – nose squashed sideways – turtle on a rock – feel much better after sun.

Royally received and ushered into palatial apartments – thought at first was spontaneous tribute by regime to the British hopeful – learnt later that Quag [Quaglino] of London had written to Quag in Rome saying tiny T was a swell guy who always paid up – rather dashed.

In things that would interest you (roar!!) saw Jane [Princess Jane di San Faustino] last night – same as ever – same people – in same positions – backgammon substituted for bridge . . . Jane addressed me as 'beautiful boy' which delighted me (a great Italian doctor next to me at lunch refused to believe I had been in the war and said I could not be more than 25) perfect country! Lunch tomorrow with Jane and a Hesse Prince who was there last night – said he was on Hitler's staff . . .

Saw today the newly appointed secretary of the Party – they are arranging for us a resumé of the whole story and methods (trumpet crash!) Poor Tomby is so nervous – everywhere he goes hands go up; but as his tiny paw creeps upward in return he hears in his mind's ear [drawing of an ear] an indignant trumpet which pulls it down again – roar roar. I am seeing everyone and very interested – no panache or mum-indignant – but quiet interest. They all know about us. Except in Jane's drawing room, where I was asked if I was still Bolshevik!!

Thursday we go to the Pontine marshes to see the great reclamation scheme. When I asked why they did not publish their doings like the Russians they said 'We are more interested in achievement than in propaganda.' *One for squashland.* Another on the squasher – The Russians last year took 100 to 150,000 children to holiday camps – the Fascists 250,000. Roads rebuilt, land reclaimed, systems of child welfare and youth training – wa wa wa – (piling it on a bit, but a good show!!)

When Fatio and Fascio resume the stout debate he will be better armed. The most interesting thing is the new psychology – 'Opposition? we do not understand! we believe in "solidarita!" Political career is then not only career in one's profession' etc. There are some trumpety reasons, but on the whole with stout prejudice she would yet be interested.

I am thinking of slipping up to Milan for fencing for a day or 2 and then back when Nach returns – unfortunately he goes tonight – I watched him training the Olympic foilists and sabreurs tonight – he is marvellous – I fight with them tomorrow – the épéeists are all at Milan. If I come back here to work with Nach I will go straight to Berlin on 21st via Munich (another little interruption trumpet

trumpet suspicious eye). We really learning a tremendous amount, and will be equipped more on return. [drawing of an outraged bird or turtle].

After Cimmie had got Tom's letter about the Fabre-Luces' party in Paris, she had written:

Darling old boy you are a scream –

I do wonder how Rome is going. Longing to hear that. Remember Fatio a bit, and not too Fascio. And do find out about 'the workers' and their conditions and what about wives and children.

Precious mutty you are the only one in the world for me. Bless you and bless you and love and love and love and happiness in abundance and fun and for old Mummy that soon too...

On 8th January Tom wrote from Rome:

Sweet Fatio [drawing of figure with arm raised in the fascist salute] Such a fascinating day. Started early to see great reclamation scheme in Pontine marshes where first time since days of Rome the Pontine waters rush to the sea (Hola Fatio!) escorted by Gelasio Gaetani younger brother of Sermoneta – qualified and worked in America as mining engineer – best type of aristo Fascist – great charmer – would undoubtedly be listed – accompanied by old McClure, G. Jebb, Murray of Embassy, Harold and Hobhouse – had lunch at one of Gaetani's houses – ruined town of Ninpha reclaimed after 5 centuries – 13th century castle of honey-coloured stone where a pope was crowned – complete ruined city of the middle ages – limpid stream with 9lb trout of type imported by Romans from Africa – lunch in castle – wonderful cakes and honey – saw reclamation scheme – fascinating country – buffaloes imported by Hannibal [drawing of a buffalo]: if they had been a little more bellowsome, would have made him quite homesick.

Gaetanis originally owned nearly all land from Rome to Naples and 200 castles – now going in with State in great consortium – the powers of the State are enormous – corporative system interferes immediately with inefficient ownership and management. Everywhere en route *Dopolavoro*, the state assisted club houses of the workers after work (come on fatio, just a sideline that).

Harold who was originally a little shaken by 'Solidarita' is visibly

more and more impressed by constructive elements. Young Tom of course maintains a balanced view –

Hurried back just in time for an interview with Mussolini – who was charming and asked a lot of very good questions. He speaks English well. Tomorrow interview minister of Corporatives and later in day fence with crack Italians of Olympic sabre team. Yesterday fought one of the Olympic épéeists and was not at all overwhelmed. May go up to Milan for a day or two as the Olympic épée team train there.

Yesterday lunched with Jane and Prince Philip of Hesse (married Princess Matilda of Italy) was intelligent and is a great Hitler man...

Rome very dead – backgammon and gambling – nothing else – we have no frivolity – work and read the whole time – all very interesting – WISHES HIS SQUASH WAS HERE –... They all miss her and send love and happy sniffs XXXX.

Cimmie wrote from Sussex:

Darling Mutty boy,

You really are sweet the lovely letts you write me and I can promise you I simply adore them and look forward to them ever so. The first Rome one arrived this morning and cheered me up no end as I was feeling low-ish – very sick and faint – slightly coldy – and these cursed signs again...

I had a long letter from Peter [Howard] from Birmingham and he said there was a good nucleus of keen serious young men to form a Youth Section...

Do stay as long as you want my sweet, I am quite hap-chap and will have lots of people to see me in London and still one or 2 country visits I can arrange...

Not on the warpath, loving him velly much, full of resolutions which she does hope will stand his return!! and weather 1932 triumphantly...

One of the joys of getting Tom's letters, Cimmie added, was that although he took immense pains to write clearly she had to 'read each page again and again before I get it all quite clear and even then there are some words I never get at all!' She did not think 'old Fascio' [Mussolini] sounded too bad: but she still worried about the 'WORKERS'. Tom said – 'All the great men here look like under-

graduates – they are so young and mostly listable'. 'Listable' meant they might go on Cimmie's 'list' of attractive men.

Christopher Hobhouse had come to Rome from Munich where he had talked with Nazis: this was a year before Hitler came to power. Hobhouse reported 'The Nazis think that we of the New Party have tried to do things too much on the grand: we should have begun in the alleys, not in Gordon Square.' Also – 'They think the fact that Tom is not a working class man will be a disadvantage to us.' Christopher Hobhouse said he saw the NUPA Youth Movement turning into something like the Nazi SS.

Argument went on in the Hotel Excelsior. Harold Nicolson insisted 'the party should be constitutional and Tom should enter Parliament'. He read fascist propaganda pamphlets: 'I agree that with this system you can attain a certain degree of energy and efficiency not reached in our own island. And yet, and yet...'

He and Tom went to dine in 'a lovely flat with a view one way to the Villa Medici and the other way all over Rome' Harold Nicolson wrote in his diary:

> Signora Sarfatti is there. She is the friend of Mussolini's whom we met at the Embassy yesterday. A blonde questing woman, the daughter of a Venetian Jew who married a Jew in Milan. It was there that she helped Mussolini on the *Popolo d'Italia* right back in 1914. She is at present his confidante and must be used by him to bring the gossip of Rome to the Villa Torlonia. She says Mussolini is the greatest worker ever known: he rides in the morning, then a little fencing, then work, and then after dinner he plays the violin to himself. Tom asks how much sleep he gets. She answers 'Always nine hours'. I can see Tom doing sums in his head and concluding that on such a time-table Musso cannot be hard-worked at all.

When Tom returned to England the New Party was formally disbanded and his association with Harold Nicolson came to an end. Harold Nicolson wrote 'He is prepared to run the risk of further failure, ridicule and assault, rather than to allow the active forces in this country to fall into other hands.' Also – 'If Tom would follow my example – retire into private life for a bit and then emerge fortified and purged – he will still be Prime Minister of England. But if he gets entangled with the boys' brigade he will be edged gradually into becoming a revolutionary, and into that waste land I cannot follow him.' Harold Nicolson, but not Tom, had been to Berlin after they had

left Rome: he had recorded – 'Hitlerism, as a doctrine, is a doctrine of despair.'

This was the last time that Tom was talked about as a probable future Prime Minister. His 'last-chances' in conventional politics had been as numerous as the farewell performances of the most magnificent prima donna: but now this style of things was over. Tom knew he would have to start from the beginning again; building up from cells; parading in the streets. He wanted to do this because old forms of growth seemed degrading to him.

Mussolini sent him two messages from Italy: one was 'not to try the military stunt in England'; the other was to go ahead and call himself fascist. These injunctions seemed somewhat contradictory.

Fascism is a form of activity where what is usually contained in games becomes reality; where what is logic is forced into flesh; where rules are broken and are not replaced. It is a state of mind that does not see that words are different from things; that suggests that what in abstract argument might be desirable can be put into effect with people. Fascism denies that there is anything above decision and justification for decision that can judge their worth; it is a style by which activity seems to be a justification for itself. The drive is towards order: but in so far as there is glimpsed almost from the beginning the fact that orderliness may not be achieved, there are the safeguards of the rhetoric of returning upon one's shield. If the drive to orderliness is towards death, it is still the drive that matters.

There has for the most part evolved in human beings a feeling that however much words are used in justification for drives there is always something slightly different, and more important, at stake: this is a more subtle feeling than that of transcendence: it is a feeling of oneself being part of a whole; of the whole being something other than the sum of the parts of the whole; it is a feeling for the significance of something aesthetic. Fascism denies this sort of aestheticism; it feels no governing shape of the whole. Fascism is an immanence, a sorting out, a tidying-up; the elimination of some things for the ostensible sake of others. Of course, the whole structure may fall down. The point of aestheticism is that it tells what will not fall down: the shape of the whole is more important than the expansion of some of the parts. With fascism, the feeling of 'greatness' is an end in itself.

Tom knew that by embracing fascism he was making some move like a gambler staking all his fortune on one number at roulette: that whether he won or lost, he would never get back to the ordinary political game. The luck he required was that the sort of crisis he had envisaged would

turn up: but in his acceptance of this he did not behave like a fascist, for he made few moves to try to bend the rules of the game. He took on all the trappings of fascism; he waited for the number, or the crisis, to turn up; but he did not, curiously, try to fix, as it were, the wheel. In this respect he was politically self-defeating; but he stayed alive.

The story of Tom's fascism is the story of another book. He was seen by orthodox fascists as a rather unsatisfactory fascist: it was to non-fascists that he sometimes seemed almost the most outlandish fascist of all. For how could someone get all dressed up for fascism and then not quite play the ruthless fascist game? Did not this put someone almost beyond belief?

Fascism is to do with ferment, with war, with the challenge of great events. But Tom was a fascist dedicated to stopping war. When he first became a fascist the established fascists called him a 'kosher fascist'. What was frightening about him was that he seemed to be playing some super-game with himself. He seemed to care not about becoming violent nor even ultimately victorious; but about seeing which way a legend might develop.

By the summer of 1932 few people in England were still thinking in terms of the immediate crack-up of the western world. The crisis had come and not of course gone, but was not so much talked about. Newspapers do not bother to report the end of a crisis. It suddenly is boring.

In Tom's private life too things suddenly seemed to be orderly. Cimmie had been ill, but was now ready to have her baby. On April 25th it was born by Caesarian operation – a boy, to be called Michael. Tom was being attentive to Cimmie: on the 11th May, their twelfth wedding anniversary, she wrote to him her most optimistic letter for some time.

> My darling darling – Have a happy time –
>
> I only want to send you a line at the end of *such* a happy anniversary to say how much I want the next year to be a happy one for us 2 as private people and a successful one for you publicly. How I long for it to be better than beastly 1931 and how much I want above all else for loveliness and understanding and sympathy to be with us and between us...

But some time earlier that spring, in his stalk like some knight-errant through the coverts of dinner parties and balls, Tom had come across, as if indeed she were a legendary maiden, a young married girl called

Diana Guinness. Their hostess had told them they would get on well together: they did not in fact get on too well at first: (Diana was apt to say at this time 'I'm just an old fashioned liberal'). But then, Diana was a great prize – at the age of twenty-one she had already gained a reputation for intelligence and beauty not only in the fashionable world but in the literary and artistic worlds of London and Paris – and it would not have seemed to Tom, since Diana appeared unique, that it mattered very much if they did not get on well at first.

CHAPTER 22

The Greater Britain

People suggested in later life that Diana might have influenced Tom in his turning to fascism; but there is no evidence for this: Tom was virtually committed to fascism before he met Diana: Diana at twenty-one had not come across fascism and would have had little power to influence Tom if she had. What she did give him however was a chance to exercise his need and talent for risk and conquest: and so perhaps just by her arrival on the scene she created something of the atmosphere as it were of fascism.

Tom's pursuit of Diana was contemporaneous with his work on his book *The Greater Britain* which was to be his public statement about British fascism. The story of himself and Diana ran parallel to what he was trying to do in politics: he was trying to become responsibly committed both to Cimmie and to Diana: he was trying to start a fascist street-movement that would be respectable. It was not his ruthlessness or singlemindedness that made him at this time seem to be doing things that were taboo: it was the way in which he seemed to be both breaking the rules of games and at the same time trying to demonstrate he was keeping them. This seemed to involve a confusion of rules as it were on a higher level.

Diana was the third daughter of Lord and Lady Redesdale: she was a Mitford: the Mitfords were not then the legendary figures they have now become (1982). But Diana was in fact at twenty-one already something of a legend – with her beauty, her cleverness, her ability to seem both conventional and unconventional at the same time. When she was eighteen she had married Bryan Guinness, the eldest son of Walter Guinness, soon to become Lord Moyne. She had gone from her eccentric but somewhat restricted schoolroom straight into a world of freedom and riches: all this has become part of the Mitford legend chronicled

by sister Nancy, her sister Jessica, by Diana herself. It was conventional of course in the world in which both she and Tom moved for married men to take out young married girls to lunch and even to dinner; it was conventional (though this was not spelt out) for them to have affairs. But the smooth running of all this – as in the world of conventional politics – depended on the participants observing rules – not even really questioning them. The rules of the social game were to do with there being no public scandal. There was little chance of scandal (newspapers kept to the rules in those days and people within the game did not talk) unless there was a question of divorce. This was the equivalent of, in politics, gangs taking to the streets.

At first in his pursuit of Diana Tom appeared to be doing no more than what he had been doing for years: he took her out; he talked; they went to his flat in Ebury Street. Then in June 1931 the Guinnesses gave a party in their house at 96 Cheyne Walk to celebrate Diana's twenty-second birthday. Diana recorded in her autobiography:

> A few things about this party dwell in my memory: myself managing to propel Augustus John, rather the worse for wear, out of the house and into a taxi: Winston Churchill inveighing against a large picture by Stanley Spencer of Cookham War Memorial which hung on the staircase and Eddie Marsh defending it against his onslaught. I wore a pale grey dress of chiffon and tulle and all the diamonds I could lay my hands on. We danced until day broke, a pink and orange sunrise which gilded the river.

What also happened at this party was that Tom made some formal proposal to Diana that their relationship should be of a more committed kind than could normally be covered by the terms of the game. He told her that he did not intend to leave Cimmie: but he was in love with her, Diana. Diana said she was in love too. She also said she wanted to be committed to him because he had convinced her about the importance of his ideas for altering the world. What would be the precise nature of the commitment could be worked out through the rest of the summer.

There is a home movie in existence of this time taken by Cimmie at the christening-party of Dick Wyndham's daughter Ingrid to whom Tom was godfather. There are the usual shots of people posturing, or performing, in front of a camera – Tom coming down a staircase and pausing with a hand on his heart; Dick Wyndham shaking a bottle of champagne so violently that it foams like a fire extinguisher. Then the

camera moves to, and rests on, Diana: she is smiling and quite still; like some statue come across in a jungle.

There had always been something awkward, enthusiastic, schoolgirlish about Cimmie. She had grown rather fat and heavy: she seemed not to take much trouble now about her clothes or her appearance. People remember her at this time still with the exuberance that could light people up when she came into a room. But she was perhaps no longer elegant.

Diana wrote of this time that her life had seemed 'absolutely useless and empty' before she met Tom. Her great friends Lytton Strachey and Dora Carrington had just died. She had enjoyed her brief reign as one of the princesses of the smart social world: she had had two children, Jonathan and Desmond, within two years. But she wanted something more. When Tom came along he was not only 'handsome, generous, intelligent and full of a wondrous gaiety' but also 'completely sure of himself and his ideas: he knew what to do to solve the economic disaster we were living through'.

Tom and Diana made plans about what they should do in the summer holidays. Diana was going to motor down through France with friends; Tom and Cimmie were due to go this year to Venice. Cimmie was still not well enough to travel by car: it was agreed that Tom should drive, and Cimmie should follow by train with the children. Tom made a plan with Diana to run into her as if by chance at Arles or Avignon.

Cimmie does not seem to have realised yet that there was anything out of the ordinary about Diana. Tom had always gone after the socially most glamorous women: two years ago he had seriously upset her with Paula Casa Maury. But she had learned to believe he would always come back to her; probably to trust that what he said about the triviality of his affairs was true. Also now he was being particularly attentive to her. As late as August 3rd Cimmie was telling Irene that Tom 'had been exquisite to her since the baby and she had not been so happy for years'. But it is an ironic fact that when people are in love they are apt to make happy for a time the other people around them.

At Avignon Diana became ill suddenly with diphtheria and had to go to bed in a hotel. A doctor from the Institut Pasteur came and gave her 'enormous injections'. She was frightened lest a letter from Tom might arrive at the hotel desk and have to be opened. She got her friends Barbara Hutchinson and Victor Rothschild enrolled in the plot and a message was got through to Tom. New arrangements were made that they should all meet in Venice when Diana got well. Tom got Diana's message in Arles. He drove to Cannes, where he wrote to Cimmie:

His own darling soft-nosed wog-tail
... Rather slacked up last two days. From Lyons Thursday went to Valence – tremendous lunch – bottle of beautiful Rosé – afterwards began to write you very witty letter but remembering both you and Lady D W [Lady de la Warre with whom Cimmie was staying in England] were a little literal minded tore it up, in case produced as evidence of insanity. Waddled on via Avignon to Arles – 'Tomby you stand where Caesar stood: twenty centuries gaze down on you and acclaim you'. [drawing of man doing fascist salute and saying 'wee wee'.] ... Got to Cannes 6 pm ... quickly landed by Lotsy and a merry thing who pressed him to come to a grand gala at Monte Carlo: he *refused* and had vegetable soup *alone* in *room*. Since striking attitudes on moonlit balcony alternating between Missolonghi and St Helena – very spacious apartment – asked very diffidently price – they said loftily they would make him a special arrangement – must be distinction of his appearance – always given much better rooms when she isn't there (I feel my indignation rising within me, better stop). THIS IS ALL A JOKE. Lots of love my sweet fellow misses her so much. Love to all [drawing of four pigs of decreasing size].

From England Cimmie replied –

My sweet darling heart. Does wish you hadn't torn up that witty lett, not *soooo* literal minded as all that, still absolutely loved the one she did get. I am sitting in the sun and the gram is playing 'Goodnight Sweetheart' which reminds me irresistibly of Lotsy and last year oh dear oh dear I wonder if she's keeping you up all night, still really I don't think I mind, as I do love you so and am pretty happy and serene about you loving me at the moment, it makes me more happy than anything in the world ...

You know, given good weather England now is a knockout – the lushness, the quiet, the colour ... I'm not sure we shouldn't try a summer or just a fortnight in Aug at Savehay once. There is something southern climates utterly lack; it's much softer and the birds sing. I really don't envy the hurry and bustle of the Croisette one bit and even the Excelsior seems garish and ugly when I think of it. I'd like to have you and the children in a quiet place where it's green and peaceful sometime ...

Darling Darling Darling You are my heart's delight ... I don't know why I love you like I do, I don't know why but I do. I do I do I do I do I do I do I do.

Love and kisses from the Porkers united and loving Wog Tail. I really am looking forward to Venice terribly. Let's have a beautiful time. 'I want to be featured by you' – words for new song by one of Tomki's girls!!

A week or two later, on the Lido at Venice, where Tom and Cimmie were staying, and the Guinnesses, and many of their mutual friends, for the first time what Tom and Diana felt about each other became apparent. They would go sightseeing in a group round the town; then they would disappear round corners, down alleyways, and would not be seen between lunch and dinner. Diana in her autobiography remembered this summer as one in which 'our countrymen were not on their best behaviour: at one party, a picnic on Torcello, there was a fight': at another Randolph Churchill called Brendan Bracken 'my brother' and there would have been another fight if Randolph Churchill had not 'snatched off' Brendan Bracken's spectacles and thrown them into the sea. Bob Boothby remembered a dinner party on the Lido at which all *dramatis personae* were present: Tom leaned across the table and said 'Bob, I shall need your room tonight before midnight and 4 am'. Bob Boothby, said 'But Tom, where shall I sleep?' Tom said 'On the beach'. Bob Boothby, recalling this story fifty years later, added with a great smile – 'And I did!'

Cimmie's children did not notice anything very unusual going on: were not grown-ups always jumping about and exclaiming and shouting? During this holiday Vivien and I were nominally under the care of Cimmie's lady's maid, Andrée: Nanny had stayed behind with Michael. An incident that stuck in our minds was when Randolph Churchill, on the beach, referred to us as 'the brats': nothing else seems to have pierced us so much during a fortnight in Venice.

During the summer, and concurrent with his pursuit of Diana, Tom had been engaged in writing *The Greater Britain* – a 40,000 word book in which he sorted out for himself, and presented to the public, his ideas about the nature of British fascism. In the second half of the book there were recommendations for Britain's economic recovery which were not different from those which he had put forward in his New Party and Labour days – the necessity for centrally controlled economic planning within a protected home-and-imperial market. But the important part of the book was its first forty pages, in which Tom outlined what he saw as the attitude and spirit of fascism.

The argument of *The Greater Britain* was that the crisis facing the world was of a more fundamental kind than that talked about in the

terms of the current economic breakdown. The inventions of science and the products of modern technology had created a new type of world during the last hundred years: yet the political institutions to deal with it had scarcely changed at all. The machinery of life was once such that it could be handled by a leisurely system of balances: now complexities and pressures and the possibilities of destruction were so great, that mankind had to fashion stronger and tighter methods of control or else there would be catastrophe.

The problem was how to organise for this control while allowing for freedom: 'to harmonise individual initiative with the wider interest of the nation.' There was not much difficulty in doing this with words. The word 'fascist', Tom said, implied 'a high conception of citizenship': it 'recognises the necessity for the authoritative state' in which 'there is no room for interests which are not the State's interests'. But somehow at the same time 'wise laws' would allow human activity 'full play'. The desire of men 'to work for themselves' would be guided into 'channels which serve the nations ends'.

In practical terms – '*Government must have power to legislate by Order subject to the power of Parliament to dismiss it by vote of censure* (the italics are in the original). Fascism 'seeks to achieve its aim legally and constitutionally by methods of law and order, *but in objective it is revolutionary or it is nothing*'. So long as the power of an elected Parliament to dismiss a Government was retained, then 'the charge of Dictatorship has no reality'.

The naiveties of *The Greater Britain* were deliberate: the paradoxes concerning the use and abuse of power were commonplace: it was from their recognition that had grown the delicate system of democratic checks and balances. But it was specifically these that fascism was now claiming were dangerously out of date: fascism stated the paradoxes, and then ignored them. It said that there just *will* be freedom for individual energies within complete state control. It was using words in such a way that the things they referred to seemed equally malleable – and thus almost meaningless.

Fascism 'combines the dynamic urge to change and progress with the authority, the discipline and the order without which nothing great can be achieved'. The word which cuts through the paradoxes is 'greatness': it is in following this device held aloft like a sword that questions of individual freedom, of state authority fall away. 'Our hope is centred in vital and determined youth, dedicated to the resurrection of a nation's greatness and shrinking from no effort and from no sacrifice to secure that mighty end.' 'In every town and village, in every institution of daily

life, the will of the organised and determined minority must be struggling for sustained effort.' Every now and then it is as if Tom remembered he must recognise he was dealing with paradoxes: 'Voluntary discipline is the essence of the Modern Movement': 'the beginning of liberty is the end of economic chaos': even – 'in a superficial paradox, it will be necessary for a modern movement which does not believe in Parliament as at present constituted to seek to capture Parliament'. But then the tone of voice goes back to that of the warrior who has broken through; who when he finds one side of a paradox being obstructive, throws it away.

Into the measured prose of *The Greater Britain* there comes from time to time – like fighting breaking out in the hall of a political meeting – the rhetoric of contempt. The favourite words of scorn are 'children' and 'old women'. Politicians of the old parties are 'like children in the dark ... [they] put their heads under the bedclothes rather than get up like men and grapple with the danger'. Orthodox economics are the remedy of the 'eternal old woman'. One of the most scathing words is 'Spain' – 'alive in a sense, but dead to all sense of greatness and to her mission in the world'. (This is odd in the light of the fact that it was Spain that was shortly to provide the one and only relatively successful fascist government.) Another contemptuous phrase for conventional politicians was 'united muttons' – odd, again, in the light of the fact that 'mutton' was one of his favourite words for Cimmie.

As well as the words there were the promises of activities to do with contempt. 'So soon as anybody, whether an individual or an organised interest, steps outside those limits [of the national interest] so that his activity becomes sectional and anti-social, the mechanism of the Corporate system descends upon him ... The State has no room for the drone and the decadent, who use their leisure to destroy their capacity for public usefulness. In our morality it is necessary to "live like athletes".'

In the last pages of the book, which return to the themes of the beginning in the style of one of Tom's perorations, his struggle to try to appear once more reasonably to embrace paradoxes results in his language becoming almost openly without content: 'We appeal to our countrymen to take action while there is still time and to carry the changes which are necessary by the legal and constitutional methods which are available. If on the other hand every appeal to reason is futile in the future, as it has been in the immediate past, and the Empire is allowed to drift until collapse and anarchy supervene, we shall not shrink from that final conclusion, and will organise to stand between the State

and ruin ... In no case shall we resort to violence against the forces of the crown but only against the forces of anarchy if and when the machinery of state has been allowed to drift into powerlessness.'

What would have given such a statement meaning was, of course, a consideration of who was to be the arbiter of when such a moment of decision had come, and what would be the extent of the moves to deal with the crisis. It was Tom's total ignoring of such questions (or the assumption that of course the arbiter of everything would be himself) that rendered the reasonableness of much of his argument irrelevant.

In the eyes of most people in 1932 the worst of the economic crisis had already gone; it was only Tom, and his incipient band of dedicated followers, who were insisting that it was still coming. But whoever might, or might not, be proved right by history, to ignore questions about how the crisis would be judged was not just to trivialise the discussion but to make the whole form of it suspect. Tom made no secret of the fact that his whole movement was a preparation for (and in fact depended on) crisis: 'in a crisis the British are at their best: when the necessity for action is not clear they are at their worst ... a complete breakdown would be a stronger incentive to action than the movement, however cumbrous, of a crippled machine.' After breakdown it might be true that 'in the highly technical struggle for the modern state in crisis only the technical organisations of Fascism or Communism have ever prevailed, or, in the nature of things, can prevail'. But then, people might reasonably ask – might not Tom, with his 'organised and determined minority', if the crisis he insisted he foresaw did not in a time that suited him materialise, be tempted reasonably (since it would come anyway) to spur on the crisis himself? The irony of Tom's political career was that he deliberately put himself into a position in which reasonable men could hardly fail to ask such a question and be alarmed at the lack of a coherent answer: while Tom himself, without giving the question any publicity or apparently even much thought, probably gave to himself an answer that reasonable men might not have had all that much cause to fear.

What Tom did publicly go on stressing was 'the ferocity of struggle and danger' and the fact that the inevitable catastrophe would only be able to be dealt with by 'new men who come from nowhere'. It was only after these ferocious men had sorted out the crisis that once more (this was one of the paradoxes Tom most naively cut through and just left) 'rational discussion of the world's economic problems would supervene'.

Throughout *The Greater Britain* there is not one reference to Jews. In

Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, written ten years previously, it is explicit that Jews are the enemy. In *The Greater Britain* the enemy is decadence. This decadence is in society; in oneself.

There is a curious impression as one reads *The Greater Britain* that the problems it presents are philosophical and psychological and have not much to do with practical politics. In politics anyone can have high-sounding ideals: anyone can slice with words through paradoxes about authority and freedom. Practicalities depend on responses to events: upon the style in which is discovered what is not possible and is practised what is. The appeal of fascism was to a 'greatness' that would march through human affairs like a column of ants: but this has not much to do with what human beings are actually like; it is to do with a longing of the psyche. Once the idea of 'greatness' is projected outside as a way of cutting through paradoxes then there is in fact no control of them but rather a helplessness – a runaway situation towards death. There is no 'greater' challenge that a man can pit himself against than one with the likelihood of death: this is a way in which life can in fact be cut through.

A way in which it might conceivably have struck Tom and those closest to him that what was being talked were paradoxes concerning themselves was Tom's curious insistence on the need to eschew and even destroy everything 'decadent' and to 'live like athletes'. For years Tom and Cimmie had enjoyed during their leisure moments the company of people who in any normal understanding of words 'use their leisure moments to destroy their capacity for public usefulness'. Tom had perhaps reasonably justified himself in this – on the grounds that it was necessary for personal equilibrium that portentous human attitudes should be balanced by some such relaxations at the other end of the scale. But then why did not he, or those closest to him, see that such balances or at least tolerances might be necessary for the equilibrium of society – and that there was a likelihood of disaster if they were treated with contempt? Diana might have seen this: before she had met Tom she had been involved in some of the more bizarre incidents of the 'decadent' age: she and her brother had put on an exhibition of paintings by Brian Howard said to be by a German artist called 'Bruno Hat' and critics had enjoyed the joke: Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* was dedicated to Bryan and Diana Guinness. Throughout her life Diana has always seemed personally to embody a balance between the passionately serious and an enjoyment of the absurd. But she, at the time, seemed to insist on some simple commitment: it seemed not to be fashionable anywhere to think about balances in politics.

The result of this sort of failure – to see that all life depends on balances; that a definition of life is in fact that which has feed-back and response; that the simplicity, the drive to the doing away of balances, results in a runaway situation towards death – the result of this sort of failure is that it can affect the mind and heart as well as the outside world. Cimmie was the person who now suffered; who perhaps wanted at last to get out of the whole arena; who had her dreams of being with Tom and the children 'in a quiet place where it's green and peaceful sometime'. She was not getting well after the birth of her baby Michael; she was still suffering from her kidney disease and she had pains in her back. Then there had been the holiday in Venice when she had discovered the seriousness of the threat of Diana and had cried much of the time. In September she went to a spa called Contrexeville in eastern France. She was trying to get her health back. She took with her her two older children.

CHAPTER 23

The British Union of Fascists

Contrexeville is a place I remember quite well, perhaps because it was one of the few times Vivien and I were on our own with our mother – in the sense of there being no other grown-ups around by whom her attention would inevitably be taken away. In practical matters (we were aged eleven and nine) we were still 'looked after' by our mother's lady's maid Andrée. We were in a big hotel called Hotel des Etablissements, which was next door to a building called the Pump Room, where people drank water out of little metal mugs. After doing this they would walk about, or sit down, until it was time to go back to the hotel or to have another drink of water. There was a park where children went round and round on paths between flowerbeds on bicycles. Our mother would sit in a wicker chair with a writing pad on her knee and write to Tom, who was in London.

My dear darling,

I wonder what your plans are. I am afraid this place would bore you unbelievably, it is just BOREDOM personified – bourgeouis dreary self-satisfied – mediocre hotel, fairly good cooking, hideous revolting people, nothing to do. I drink a glass of water from 8 am every 25 mins for 2 hours, then am massaged for an hour, then go across the way and have Diatherm treatment then ionisation – then am finished except for more and more water and a diet.

In the pm we go out in the car – lovely country road. Today went to Domremy where Joan of Arc was born. I have no breakfast, no tea, lunch at 12.15, dinner 7.30. It is now 9, and after this letter I shall go to bed. There is a Casino but I have not been in, and a Cinny. I hope it really will do me good, and I will come home well and hearty ...

Cimmie in these letters makes few references to her children. She makes no direct reference to what Tom might be doing in London. It was as if she were going more and more into her private world in which nothing much mattered except the dream in which she and Tom would somehow, some day, be all right together. It was this that signified to her the recovery from her illness.

> I really feel we will have a good winter – you building up your organisation, coping with the sales of your book, having a happy time *with* your family – and some stolen moments with lovely sillies but not *too* many – mum seeing to household, coping with children, getting together nice intelligent Circle, arranging *fun* – does it seem a nice proposition. I hope so.

Children find it difficult to be aware of their parents' sicknesses: parents are like the natural course of events: what happens when a course of events gets out of joint? I remember getting on badly with my sister at this time: we had ferocious fights: after one which went up and down the corridors of the huge hotel like one of our father's street-fights my mother came out of her room and admonished both of us equally. I was outraged at this: I thought I was in the right: but anyway, where was justice in a world that did not even enquire into rights? I rushed into our bedroom and locked myself in the lavatory. I thought I would stay there until I died; then the grown-ups would be sorry. My mother and sister did come to the door from time to time and ask me to come out: they even pushed food under the door for me: I pushed this back. It seemed that I was in there for a vast stretch of time: I suppose in fact it was no more than most of a day. I became aware after a time that although I seemed to be winning there was in fact no such thing as winning: I would lose face if I came out but if I stayed in I would die: this might be some sort of victory, but I would not be there to see it. This perhaps is a common romantic predicament. Eventually I emerged tentatively at night and my mother appeared at the bedroom door and held out her arms to me and I ran into them and cried. I remember this well: it is almost the only time I remember my mother holding me.

Tom wrote to Cimmie from London:

> His own darling soft-nosed wog-tail
> Glad to hear that Flexyville is not so bad – working very hard – organising sale of book and many statements on current politics etc.

> Fencing every night and morning at RAC – seeing no one – practically! Might turn up at Flexyville at any time but do not wait as in a great turmoil. Rather enjoying it all. Directly I am satisfied organisation can run without me will go off on another trip. Forgot to tell you – an idea that B. Bracken (listen CM) and I should meet Winston and Lindemann on Como. Lots of love and happy squashes. [drawing of a gondola; then of a pig with its nose against a wheel]. Back at the grindstone – far, far away from Venice *pleasure* and *temptations*.

One of the expeditions that Cimmie took the children on was to the trenches and dug-outs of the first world war which had been preserved near Verdun. We were taken round the sand-bagged passages like sewers and the holes in the ground like those of rats: these were the memorials of man's urges to get rid of himself. We were aware that our father had been somewhere near here some sixteen years ago: that he cared passionately that there should be no more war. He was in London, we understood, doing something about an organisation which would prevent war; which would appeal to reason over the heads of mad politicians.

At times Cimmie seemed to be dealing with her own predicaments quite well. She wrote:

> Bless you my darling right deep down I *have* confidence, my most secret soul knows we are all right, I love you and you love me till Death do us part; but various surface selves need encouraging now and then, need a little bolstering up, want a little public demonstration, want to show off a bit, and it is that part that gets hurt and upset. All the sweetness in the world isn't quite the same as a demonstration of affection and choice in public and my bowels yearn for the latter as well as appreciating the former.
>
> Shan't expect you here more than 1 or at most 2 nights, would *love* that, but *at pinch* would understand none at all. Remember always how I love you.

But then again – as if she were indeed under some attack in war, or plagued by the illness she had come to Contrexeville to cure – the other part of her would come out on top.

> My heart is not yet quite right about you, it hurts when I think of you, it misses you dreadfully, and is as jealous as hell. All the time I

try to reason with it, with my head. Theories could hardly be improved on: practice not so good I fear. Still, Tom, doing some thinking and philosophising – how much it will stand any strain of events remains to be seen ... I hug you. I love you. What am I? I forget. Is it your soft-nosed squash-tail?

There are medical reports on what was wrong with Cimmie at the time it was decided she should go to Contrexeville: they were written in July 1932, just before the summer holiday in Venice.

Very briefly the history is that she had spinal curvature from childhood and in recent years this has been getting worse. Has had six attacks of lumbago in her life. For the past two years she has been stiff in the back.

In September last she fell out of a wagon loft and soon after had acute pyelitis with high temperature etc. The exact date of onset of the increase in the back is indefinite, but the pain definitely became worse at her last pregnancy, so that she even had to have morphia to relieve it. She was in bed three months in all. She was better after the child was born but the pain increased again as soon as she got up and she is now unable to take any form of active exercise ... Sneezing is agony. For history of kidney infection see (enclosed) note.

Lady Cynthia Mosley has a bacillus coli infection of her urinary tract which appears to date from Sept 1931 ... On several occasions the question of terminating the pregnancy arose. Since the Caesarian section the kidney has settled down; the urine still contains colon bacilli ...

It was to get rid of these, ostensibly, that she had come to Contrexeville. After a fortnight a report read 'Colon bacilli nearly disappeared'.

Tom announced his intention of coming out. 'Here is the plan of squash world – say if it is not porker – he will cross Saturday 10th, stay night in Paris, and come on to Flexyville next day. Porkers united!' There is a photograph of Tom at Contrexeville standing by his Bentley, and looking rather sad.

In London, he had been seeing to the publication of *The Greater Britain* which was to be put out by his own publishing company and was to coincide with the launching of the British Union of Fascists in October. Representatives were sent out all over the country with the book: this was to provide information for the cells of the 'organised and determined minority'.

The story of the British Union of Fascists will be told in another book: but the beginnings of it belong here, because they overlap with the story of Cimmie's life and death. Harold Nicolson had recorded in April that Tom did not want 'to allow the active forces of this country to fall into other hands': it was because of this he was prepared to 'run the risk of further failure, ridicule and assault'. By 'active forces' was meant, presumably, the fascist-type bodies already in existence.

The two main home-grown fascist groups were – The British Fascists, founded by Miss Lintorn-Orman who (it was often explained) was the grand-daughter of a Field Marshal, and to whom in 1923 the idea of saving the country from communism had come while she was weeding her kitchen garden: and the Imperial Fascist League, founded by Arnold Leese, who had been a vet specialising in the diseases of camels and whose anti-semitism had arisen (so the story went) from his objection to kosher methods of slaughtering animals. Throughout the nineteen-twenties there had been numerous schisms and splinter-groups from these bodies: for a time Brigadier Blakeney, previously an administrator of the Egyptian State Railways, took over the British Fascists; then he joined Arnold Leese, and both of them disassociated themselves from Italian fascism on the grounds that it was too favourable to Jews. There were splinter-groups called The British Empire Fascists, The Fascist League, The Fascist Movement, The National Fascisti, and the British National Fascists: it seemed that the number of bodies was limited only by the availability of names. None of the groups had much of a policy: they felt they existed to protect old fashioned virtues to do with patriotism and law and order against the world-wide conspiracies of people like Communists and Jews. They marched to and fro, and cared about uniforms and flags and badges.

When Tom came along and proposed a merger of all these groups into the British Union of Fascists he was objected to violently by Arnold Leese on the grounds that he was being manipulated by Jews – to divert attention from Leese's true anti-semitism. And in fact in March 1933 the *Jewish Chronicle* declared – 'The Mosley Fascists themselves are our best supporters in the fight against The Imperial Fascists League.' It was the latter who called the British Union Kosher Fascists; and claimed that Cimmie was Jewish. In a fight between Mosley fascists and Leese's Imperial Fascist Guard in 1933 Leese was beaten up and General Blakeney got a black eye: this was the only fight, Tom said later, in which his stewards got out of control. At the time he was soon claiming that the only fascists left outside his organisation were 'three old ladies

and a couple of office boys'. But then – what kind of people were the fascists within his organisation?

It is easy to write slightly mockingly about early fascists: such an attitude is in reaction to Tom's own idealistic claim that he was discovering a 'new' type of man. They were mostly sincere idealists. The British Union of Fascists officially came into existence on October 1st 1932 when there was a flag-unfurling ceremony in the old New Party offices in Great George Street. Tom said 'We ask those who join us ... to be prepared to sacrifice all, but to do so for no small and unworthy ends. We ask them to dedicate their lives to building in the country a movement of the modern age ... In return we can only offer them the deep belief that they are fighting that a great land may live.' But the question of interest, as usual, was how successful Tom would be in putting his fine sentiments into effect.

The first public meeting of the BUF was on October 15th in Trafalgar Square. There was not much of a crowd. Photographs show Tom making his speech on the plinth at the bottom of the column: he is wearing a dark suit and tie and a white shirt: eight men with black shirts and grey flannel trousers are around him. Newspapers reported that Cimmie and her two older children were there. I have no memory of this.

A week or so later there was an indoor meeting in the Memorial Hall at Farringdon Street in the City. Here Tom, answering rather obstreperous questions from a group in the gallery, referred to 'three warriors of class war all from Jerusalem'. Fighting broke out: two of the questioners were ejected. Afterwards Tom was reported by *The Times* as saying 'Fascist hostility to Jews was directed against those who financed communists or who were pursuing an anti-British policy.' This was the first public reference by Tom as a fascist to Jews.

After the meeting there were further scuffles in the street. The scene was the prototype of what was to become an archetypal pattern of fascist and anti-fascist behaviour. *The Times* reported:

> Sir Oswald marched in the midst of about 60 or 70 of his supporters along Fleet Street, the Strand, and Whitehall, to the headquarters of the British Union of Fascists at 1, Great George St, S.W. Of this party, all young men, many wore either grey or black shirts, without jackets, and nearly all were hatless. They roared patriotic songs and the rallying cries of their organisation in turn, and behind them walked a smaller party of men and women roaring revolutionary songs and slogans.

The sort of slogans that the fascists and anti-fascists used to sling to and fro at each other like tennis-balls were:

Two, four, six, eight,
Whom do we appreciate?
M.O.S.L.E.Y. – Mosley!

and:

Hitler and Mosley, what are they for?
Thuggery, buggery, hunger and war!

As a result of Tom's reference to Jerusalem in his Farringdon Street speech (Irene recorded in her diary) Israel Sieff, a prominent Jewish businessman, withdrew a tentative offer of support for Tom.

The British Union of Fascists was not in its origins a working class movement; it was composed mainly of lower-middle-class men who resented the inequalities and lack of opportunities under capitalism; they also feared the prospect of repression of individualism under socialism. They were mostly young: those who were not, looked back to a spirit of youthfulness such as they had found in the war. They joined the movement not so much because they cared about any policy but because they wanted order; and they felt the disorderly paradoxes of life might be solved if they handed responsibilities to a leader whose words seemed to cut through difficulties like a knife.

In the first edition of *The Greater Britain* (5,000 copies had sold out quickly) Tom had written 'Leadership may be individual or, preferably in the case of the British character, a team'. In the second edition the sentences were added 'But undoutedly single leadership in practice proves the more efficient instrument. The Leader must be prepared to shoulder absolute responsibility.' This was undoubtedly what he found his followers wanted. A black shirt uniform for the BUF was designed which was copied from Tom's fencing jacket: Tom was reported as saying that the shirt was 'the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace'. A uniform was useful for control if there was to be fighting at meetings: also it did seem to be some sacrament (did Tom realise the significance of his words?) by which his followers might feel they were absolved from responsibility themselves.

Tom's activities in the streets brought forth comments from friends and associates in his other world. Harold Nicolson wrote that he was saddened by the thought of 'young Bermondsey boys with *gummiknüppel*

(rubber truncheons). Irene complained – 'I wish everyone would not come in and say Tom was a musical comedy fool with his blackshirt group'. Both Irene and Baba had been at the Farringdon Street meeting: afterwards they discussed it with 'rather broken hearts'.

> Baba said his speech had been so fine, why descend to the Jerusalem inanity, and really the little man in the balcony was quite inoffensive. She waited for Tom for hours at Smith Square and finally he swaggered in like a silly schoolboy only proud of some silly scuffles and rows whilst marching home and glorying over his menials throwing two lads down the stairs at Farringdon Street and possibly injuring them and all this swagger and vanity to Mrs Bryan Guinness and Doris Castelrosse – muck muck muck. When he is such a magnificent orator, and if he had vision, he could have carried the entire hall with him without descending to these blackshirt rows he seems to revel in, and none of his friends will tell him what a ludicrous figure he makes of himself.

But on the path that Tom had chosen for himself it was not ludicrous that he should chuck hecklers out of his meetings, nor that he should not be too concerned if there were scrimmages on his marches. He had a policy that he wanted to be heard: it was a fact that in his pre-fascist days people had defeated him by ignoring him. He believed that his economic policies might save the country: if he was to make himself heard, not only had he to ensure that he was not shouted down but he needed publicity. The sort of public image he wanted to project was that of someone who would guard law and order in the face of those who were out to cause disruption. Logically, all this made sense. And in Italy, fascists had in fact got power by presenting a tough, theatrical image. There was still the question of tactics – if all this in political terms was not to be turned against him.

Cimmie, now back in Smith Square, made designs for a fascist flag; she discussed with Tom the prospect of turning Sousa's 'Stars and Stripes' into a fascist anthem with words by Osbert Sitwell. (William Walton was later asked if he would write music). Cimmie went to Tom's meetings, but she did not appear on platforms nor take part in the marches. It was as if she still could not quite make up her mind about what was happening.

Diana, for all her seriousness and sophistication, might have found it easier to accept in the BUF what Irene called 'the musical comedy element': there was something in all Mitfords, as was later said about

Diana's sister Nancy, that saw the world as something of a 'tease', and that they might tease.

In his private life Tom seems to have been managing his juggling act quite well; he was keeping all his plates, or whatever, fairly harmoniously up in the air at the same time. On October 8th, a week before the BUF's inaugural meeting in Trafalgar Square, Cimmie, in a plane between Paris and London, wrote to Tom, who was staying (according to the address on the envelope) with the Guinnesses at their home at Biddesden, in Hampshire.

> Just want to send him love. Don't know yet of course whether she is to go on [this refers probably to the Trafalgar Square meeting] but if so will do best gladly and proudly for him: if not will come home determined to really try and both be happy and help meet to him. Bless your heart, if I do try and see your point of view, please be sweetie and see my p. of v. Be kind. Moo moo.

But Tom, involved in his public life with 'the ferocity of struggle and of danger', would not have had time for much kindness. The style of the task he had set himself was that you had to fight to stay alive: you attracted people to you by your ability to show off ruthlessly and win. A month after the Farringdon Street meeting newspapers reported one at St Pancras where 'some of the fascists had the shirts torn from their backs and received razor slashes': the battle with left-wing militants was once more under way. Each side said that they were fighting for what they believed in: but what they believed in was the struggle against the other: this was the nature of their power, and the chance of their extending it. Fascists and communists needed one another as enemies: if each did not have the other, then indeed they were ludicrous because they were punching at empty air. No one was talking much about Tom's economic proposals now: but then, not many people had wanted to talk about them before.

At the time of the launching of the New Party a year and a half ago it had been Tom who had become ill: he had perhaps glimpsed the nature of the path from which he would not be able to turn back. He was now on that path: he had gambled on gaining political power on his own terms, or nothing. In private life he was gambling too against almost impossible odds – for the perfect arrangement by which he could have Cimmie as wife and Diana as mistress and everyone be happy as he himself strode in and out of protecting rings of fire.

CHAPTER 24

Diana Guinness

In the autumn of 1932, when I was nine, I was sent to boarding school. My mother had taken trouble to find a suitable school: the one chosen was Abinger Hill, near Dorking in Surrey. It was known as being 'progressive': the sort of school rich socialists or ex-socialists might send their children to. What was progressive about it was that boys were allowed to do a lot of their work in their own time and in their own way, and a good deal of freedom was allowed to them in the surrounding countryside.

My father used to say he was haunted up to the end of his life by memories of how he had hated boarding schools; he was bitter against his mother for sending him away.

I look back on Abinger Hill with some gratitude. There were the usual squalors and miseries, but it gave a child a chance to learn, and to make, what adjustments were possible; and thus it did what all schools should do, which is to teach a child what are the terms of the grown-up world by which later he might feel free. What I remember about my first year at Abinger Hill was the way in which life on the mundane level seemed to be dominated by schoolboy gangs: the masters floated almost in another dimension like gods. It was comparatively easy to learn to come to terms with the gods: apart from a few compulsory lessons the work that boys did could be arranged by the boys themselves: when they had done a piece of work they were supposed to present it to a master who would judge it and then according to its quantity and quality would mark up a line on a graph in this or that coloured pencil. Each boy carried his graph around with him as the frontispiece of a loose-leaf notebook. It struck me almost at once that the most sensible way of dealing with this situation would be to lay in a store of pencils oneself – particularly those of the colours denoting 'good' or even

'excellent' – and to mark up, from time to time, one's own graph; thus doing away with the need for a lot of boring work and leaving time free for reading interesting things like *The Modern Boy* and *The Wizard* in the lavatory. (How much of childhood seems to have been spent locked for safety in lavatories!) When the time came for end-of-term examinations one could always mug up quickly all the work one was supposed to have done, and this was the only way work could be made interesting anyway; because it would be for a purpose and in response to a challenge.

The problem of the older-boy gangs of bullies was much more difficult. When I arrived at the school there was a ritual known (I have changed the name) as 'Brown's Daily Blub'. Brown was I suppose a rather unprepossessing boy, and each day after breakfast a column would form and would follow Brown through the passages and round the changing rooms chanting, as if it were one of the political slogans used at my father's marches, 'Brown's Daily Blub!': until, in the course of time, it became a self-validating statement in that Brown did, in fact, blub; after which the column would disperse. I remember being amazed at this: at first because I could not see the point of it; then because I could not understand the odd pleasures of joining in.

Even more alarming rituals were apt to take place in the woods on Sunday afternoons. One Sunday shortly after I had arrived the new boys were rounded up by the senior boys and were marched off into the woods and there we were split into two groups and one group was ordered to dig the graves of the other group and to bury them up to their necks. If anyone in the digging group demurred, it was explained, he would be put into the other group – or worse. This was indeed a sort of predicament about to become common in the grown-up world. I was, by luck, in the digging group. We dug rather shallow graves. Then one or two of the other group were told to lie in the graves and we were told to pee on them. I remember there was a bit of a remonstrance about this: I don't remember, perhaps mercifully, exactly the outcome. What I do remember is that some days later the whole school was assembled and the headmaster announced that it had come to his notice via a letter written by one of the new boys to his mother that certain of the new boys had been out in the woods burying others up to their necks and then – but the sequel was not mentionable. And so – for this, certain new boys were going to be beaten if not expelled. Nothing was said about any older boys. What I remember about all this was a feeling of the inexorability of it: there was nothing one could do: this was what life was like. Older boys took you into the woods and told you to do

these things: of course it was against the rules to tell about the older boys: even the boy who had written to his mother had not told about them. He had broken a rule by writing to his mother; but then, at least he had been buried up to his neck. And so myself, and other boys, were beaten. One had to learn about the ways people behaved.

Boarding school was a place in which one learned that the world away from home was cold and damp and smelt of ink and herrings; in which one had to be cunning in order to survive; one of the ways of being cunning was to accept somewhat arbitrary injustices but if one did this there were magical moments of laughter at the awful ways of bullies and of gods. I do not know what the masters made of all this: perhaps, like wise gods, they thought it best to pretend not to know what was really going on and to let their children learn in their own ways. But at boarding school one learned one could not fight the system; the danger of this was, one might believe it of later life.

One of the agonising matters for boarding-school children is the appearance or almost existence of their parents: parents are required to be conventionally prosperous yet completely unremarkable. My first term at Abinger Hill coincided with my father's launching of The British Union of Fascists: this was such a profound embarrassment that it placed me as it were beyond usual categories of alarm. I was nicknamed by a friendly master 'Baby Blackshirt': I had to make some virtue of this, or die. This was not impossible. I had loyalty and admiration towards my father: were not he and my mother outstanding after all: how lucky to be the son of someone so unique as a rich titled ex-socialist fascist! And how boring to be a child of unremarkable, conventionally prosperous parents! Somewhere floating around in the background, I suppose, was the gratefully accepted respectability conferred by the memory of grandfather Curzon. I built up a good deal of armour about all this: but was still vulnerable as it were to torpedoes below the consciousness line. My stammer, not bad when talking to friends, in any sort of school activity got worse.

A week or so after the incident of gravedigging in the woods I wrote home – 'Darling Mummy and Daddy, I am very happy here. Thank you very much for all your letters. I am not at all homesick. Yesterday 7 of us went blackberrying but we did not get much. We have very nice meals. Love from Nick.

Neither Tom nor Cimmie had much talent for noticing what life in fact was like around them: their talent was for ideas, for resolutions, for insisting that life should be what it ought to be; for making passionate gestures when it was not. Tom's very determination that a new type of

society had to be built by a new type of man prevented him from looking and seeing what men actually were: Cimmie's faith that in the end she and Tom would be all right stopped her perhaps observing cunningly how to make them so. She endured: she complained. Tom was cunning: but there was danger of catastrophe in his use of cunning for his own ends.

After the somewhat public imbroglio about his private life at Venice Tom seems to have managed in his usual way to placate Cimmie while he continued with his amazing juggling act. But sometimes things went wrong; manipulations flew out of control.

> Darling Tom, As I don't want to spare any time we may have together by nags and reproaches I write to explain about Sunday. If only you would be frank with me, that is what I beg. If when you refused Mereworth you had said it was because you thought you would like to take Diana out for the day Sunday I would have known where I was. I started by thinking it odd but as you said nothing about another plan I began to think it must be that you wanted to stay at home and just be with us and I was so pleased. Then you tell me about Sunday as if it was vague and only planned last night – and then I realise the whole thing was arranged before and you had been putting off telling me and letting me go on thinking we were going to have a lovely Sunday together and then jump it on me after the party last night. Even then you first say 'Go a drive for an hour or two' and I get adjusted to that; then this morning it's lunch and I rearrange my point of view but you say anyway back for evening; then you ring up and say whole bally day and night – well it's pure funking, why not tell me days ago, why not be truthful and honest. That is honestly and truly what I want – beloved Tom do believe that – but the feeling that you are not telling me, that you do things behind my back, that you are only sweet to me when you want to get away with something, gives me such a feeling of insecurity and anxiety and worry I am more nervy and upset than I ought or need to be.
>
> The book I am reading says this: 'If John were extra sweet to you then he had something to hide' – very Tomki.
>
> Oh darling darling don't let it be like that, I will truly understand if you give me a chance, but I am so kept in the dark. That bloody damnable cursed Ebury – how often does she come there? Do you think that I just forget all about her between the Fortnum and Mason party and last night? I schooled myself the whole week never to even mention her in case I should nag or say something I should regret.

> And then I have the horrid feeling this morning you've let me down – don't do that my angel please, I'm complicated because I feel insecure and afraid. Don't be secretive and hidey – I love you so much I'd cope if you were open with me. Mutton

But human beings do not on the whole succeed in coping openly with this sort of situation: openness succeeds with simplicity: when complexity is at stake what is demanded is self-sufficiency, or some style. Cimmie wrote to a woman friend (Mary Pearson) to ask for advice. She got the reply:

> It is natural and essential to mind unfaithfulness. It should always be done a la Victorian without the knowledge of the other party. We place an intolerable and mad psychological strain on ourselves with all this so-called frankness. If Tom wishes to have affairs he is welcome – but you shouldn't know ... It's 'contrary to nature' as the old women used to say ...

This was the old aristocratic attitude. But it was just this that Cimmie had spent her life trying to break away from. And she did not seem to have the resources, now, to re-build a life on her own.

During the autumn Tom went again to Rome for a fascist anniversary: he wanted to keep the visit secret. From Rome he wrote the last letters that are in existence from him to Cimmie: after this, when he was not with her, he seemed to think it better to keep quiet.

> His own darling fellow
> What a roarer – no harm in a few pictures!
> Rome very interesting. Celebration and illuminations – the reception of M tremendous – a great tribute to the system – very interesting accounts of the 10 years work in the papers which I will bring home. Have not seen any friends yet but have heard from some of them.
> [series of squiggles as if ending the letter]
> Was rather cross, but opened this again to say he loves her very much – not to be a goat because he adores her and she is his own sweet one he loves. Darling fellow, they could have such a lovely life together if his little frolicsome ways did not upset her. She does mean so much to him and he does so appreciate her. She is such a great fellow. He loves her so. [drawing of a piglet] X

Enclosed in this letter were two advertisements cut out of newspapers.

The first was headlined *The Wolsey People Have Got At Poor Matilda* and went on 'No self-respecting sheep is safe. Let it once be observed that her fleece is really first rate, and away it may go at any moment to the Wolsey mills ...' Above this Tom had drawn two illustrations – one of a sheep with its wool on beside which he had written 'But he prefers –': and the other of a shorn sheep beside which Tom had written 'Sad effects of getting in a stew about nothing.'

The other advertisement was of a charging rhinoceros with the headline *Nature In The Raw Is Seldom Mild*: and beside which Tom had written 'Fatty finding out after a few peeps.' (It is not known what were the 'pictures' referred to at the beginning of the letter).

Tom's second letter to Cimmie from Rome was:

> His own darling fellow [drawing of piglet]
> *Has a really great regret did not bring her with him.* Suppose could not have foreseen. But does really regret it awfully. Might have had a *lovely honey squash.* Seeing some of friends tomorrow – may have to wait longer for others – everyone so terribly busy over anniversary ...
>
> One great regret I did not bring her – how one wastes life and yet so difficult to foresee – should really have settled definitely stay a week – always see you amid such turmoil of work or if a holiday of other things. Would have liked this to be a sweetly sweetly lovely time – misses her so much wiffling and sniffing about! Really loves her very much indeed, sure she is the one for him, glad she still loves him, sorry he is such a Porker. Feeling very calm and rested now, my life is so strenuous and hectic, I must recapture a little calm. Very ill and wretched on arrival – caught chill on boat – but all gone now. First lovely sunshine. I hope anyhow return before end of week but will wire you. Would be ever so happy if she were here. As it is rather sad and down. But hopes see her soon. Loves my darling fellow. Think sweetly of him who loves her!
>
> [huge drawing of a piglet]

Tom meant this when he wrote it: no one who knew him ever denied that he meant it when he said he loved Cimmie: what people questioned was how he could both mean this and behave as he did. This was the peculiarity about Tom – how he did not seem restricted by other people's inability to hold opposites at the same time; and he did not feel guilt. It is probable that he had stopped feeling sexually attracted to Cimmie: she had often been ill in the last two years and had grown

heavy. But even if he had continued to be sexually attracted to her he had shown often enough he could be involved in this way with more than one person at once. What was happening now was that he loved two people at once.

That Tom felt little guilt can be seen by the calmness with which he justified himself all round: to Cimmie he referred to Diana as part of his 'little frolicsome ways': he would not have told Diana of the reassuring things he said to Cimmie. This was, in the circumstances, reasonable. But Diana would not have known how Cimmie suffered. What other people could not forgive Tom for was his lack of guilt.

Cimmie was helpless because she was lulled by his sweet reasonableness, by what seemed his simplicity, by his baby-drawings hung out like bait on the end of a line. Then when she found he also loved someone else the bottom fell out of her life. She did not have the capacity – as many people do not have – to accept the terrible complexities of love; that in such areas things can both be and not be at the same time.

What was destructive about Tom was that in spite of his manifest complexities he still, in the matter of words, insisted on doing his simple baby-talk with Cimmie: he hardly ever helped her to attain her own complexities of mind. He had probably learned that this was the best way of preventing her protesting too strongly about his 'frolicsome ways': but in so doing he was allowing some outrage to fester inside her.

Cimmie kept on trying to make her calm, serious decisions about learning to accept Diana as she had accepted other women in Tom's life. She kept on being defeated because the extent seemed never ending of what she had to accept.

At the end of 1932 Tom and Cimmie rented a house at Yarlington, in Somerset – Savehay Farm was still let. There we had a family Christmas with Cimmie's sister Irene and her sister Baba with her three children: for some reason Uncle Fruity Metcalfe was Father Christmas this year and the children at last all guessed who he was because of his unmistakable Irish brogue. Tom and Cimmie planned a New Year's fancy-dress party with many of their old friends. Irene reported 'a lot of talk about how to conceal it from those foul gossip writers who had already written it up and asked to come down and photograph the guests'. Friends who lived in the neighbourhood such as Cecil Beaton were to bring their house parties. The last time that Tom had been pursued by newspapers had been after the razor attack on him at St Pancras. It was odd that he should have wanted to give such a party now – when he was in the business of building up the image of the hard, 'new' man. But then – might not in fact a 'new' man be someone who took

pride in being all things to all people? Among Tom and Cimmie's own house party guests was Diana Guinness.

The party was rather wild – Tom got over-excited and threw an éclair which hit Syrie Maugham on the head. She had hysterics: the newspapers duly reported the scene. The *Daily Worker* commented – 'The above picture of fascists at play should remove once and for all any lingering doubt as to the superman nature of Mosleyini self-cast for the role of the future dictator of Britain.' This was a subtle conclusion to be drawn from the evidence of a thrown éclair: it does not always suit Marxists to link fascism to images of effeteness. But it was probably true that Tom was at the height of his superhuman feelings just then – thinking he might get away with everything.

Some time before the new year it had been agreed between Tom and Diana that she would leave her home and set up house on her own so that she and Tom could see each other more easily. People's jealousies were making it difficult to abide by any rules of the game. And in fact Diana anyway wanted to 'nail her colours to the mast'; to 'throw in her lot' with Tom (the phrases are hers): it was one of her characteristics, as it was one of Tom's, that when emotions and beliefs became serious she would want to throw over the boards of games. Tom himself probably wanted publicly to be seen to carry off some great prize: this would be a compensation for other disappointments. But above all, Tom and Diana were involved in a grand passion: they thought they were made for each other, and continued to think this for fifty years.

Diana's sister Nancy Mitford wrote to her in November – 'You know, I feel convinced that you won't be able to take this step ... everybody that you know will band together and somehow stop you ... I believe you have a much worse time in store than you imagine.' However – 'Whatever happens *I* shall always be on your side.'

In January Diana moved with her two small children and a nanny into 2 Eaton Square – a house made available to her rent free by the Grosvenor Estate on condition that she repaired it and redecorated it – she was even given a grant for this purpose. This does not seem to have been done as a special favour to Diana: with economic conditions such as they were in January 1933 (the unemployed had reached nearly three million) it was just that it was difficult to find suitable tenants for empty houses in Eaton Square.

Diana's friends continued to predict nothing but disaster for her in her relationship with Tom. Her three younger sisters were forbidden to visit her house. The taboo that she had broken was to have set herself up openly as Tom's mistress: Tom had broken the taboo of accepting

this while remaining openly married to Cimmie. Tom seemed to be claiming simply that he had the right to have two wives – a state of affairs traditionally indeed held to be taboo. Moreover one of the wives had been for years a favourite of society because of her enthusiasm and charm, and the other was the currently most sought-after young beauty of the tribe. Tom could not have been surprised that there were strong feelings against them.

Irene recorded in her diary:

> My heart was in my boots over the hell incarnate beloved Cim is going through over Diana Guinness bitching her life wanting to bolt with Tom and marry him and the whole of London getting at me and Baba with the story he had gone with her and needless to say every Redesdale up in arms and Walter Guinness only wanting to 'crash' him and this blithering cow-faced fool insanely ditheringly recklessly trying to ruin Cim's life for her 19-year-old crush on that vain insensate ass Tom.

In fact Lord Redesdale and Walter Guinness (Diana's father-in-law) did try to scare Tom off: they went in a deputation together to his flat in Ebury Street. Tom was with Randolph Churchill before they arrived; he said 'Those two old men are coming to see me': Randolph Churchill said 'What are you going to do?' Tom said 'I suppose wear a balls' protector'.

It was not true that Diana expected to marry Tom: he had made it clear that he would not break his marriage to Cimmie: he had made this clear to Cimmie herself. It was just that 'the whole of London' (Irene's phrase) could not believe that Diana would have left her husband on those terms. But this was, of course, one of the great attractions of Diana: that she would stake her life, as Tom was doing, on something she believed in but which was unlikely to go all her own way. In fact she expected to see Tom only 'when he could spare time from his all all-absorbing political work and the family to which he was devoted' (this was Diana's description in her autobiography). And Tom's engagement diary for 1933 does bear out that this is roughly what happened: he would see Diana for lunch or dinner two or three times a week; he would also enter his dates for lunch or dinner with Cimmie. He also entered the dates he had with Cimmie's sister Baba. Sometimes he would see all three on the same day – 'January 6th: Lunch Cim; Baba 4.15; Dine D.'

Cimmie, in her few remaining letters, seems to have alternated

between faith that in the end Tom would be left more hers than anyone else's as had happened before – 'My darling one, my own sweet love, just a line to say I am happy and all is well and I am looking forward to all being back at Smith Square': and the old schoolgirlish rage which, God knows, Tom could hardly now think he could placate with baby-talk. 'What an idiot you are, really, Tom, going through the fencing prints to stick up in Ebury this p.m. ...' (this is the only letter from Cimmie that seems to have been censored: the page is torn off below this point.) But then Cimmie would be making her resolutions and requests again (Tom in letters was now silent); and in one case Cimmie wrote as if she were forming an inscription on a tombstone:

I herby make a
Solemn Vow &
Covenant
not to again what you call nag
I will really
TRY & TRY & TRY
& can only ask in return a certain measure
of kindness and decency as to *Provocation*
Herby sealed and signed the 26th March
by
Cynthia Mosley
Do let's start off by having a lovely happy day
today so sunny and birds twittering. Help me
my darling.

CHAPTER 25

The Death of Cimmie

It became fashionable in later life for people to say that my father was responsible for my mother's death. I remember the scene when this was first suggested to me: I was in the nightnursery at Savehay Farm: I was twelve or thirteen: I had been trying to get Nanny to explain why she would never speak to my father's friend Mrs Guinness who was staying in the house. Nanny said – Well, if it had not been for – whatever it was – she did not think my mother would have died. Nanny had her back to me by the washbasin: there were blue and white striped curtains in front of a cupboard. I remember thinking even then – But you can't say something like that is a *cause* of why people die: I mean, there is that sort of thing, isn't there, and people don't die? I suppose I was quite a clever little boy. I had also, for years, thought that much of the grown-up world was mad: that they liked not liking one another. It seemed to me the most striking thing about this bit of news was that it showed how people must hate my father: I was glad that he seemed so impervious to this. And anyway – if people thought that my mother had died because of whatever my father was up to with Mrs Guinness, what about her children, did people think she had cared more about that sort of thing than about them?

Tom was a fool, I suppose, to imagine he could go on juggling with people as if they had no hearts to fall and break: he could not have foreseen such a bitter nemesis. Many people get into the same sort of situation as Tom and Cimmie and Diana: not many, in fact, die. Cimmie became ill; she had an operation: there could be conjectures about what weaknesses were in her to make her not equipped to get well. But weaknesses are not a cause of death. If Cimmie had not died, Diana did not believe that Tom would ever have left her. In time she, Diana, might have got tired and left. Or Cimmie and she might eventually have made friends.

The reason why people felt so bitter about Tom was not rational but symbolic: if Tom had put himself outside the rules of the social game it was inevitable that he should be blamed for any nemesis. He himself was always curiously unaware of such bitterness: for the most part he thought life so wonderful himself, that he could not believe others might need bitterness.

It was suggested also that Cimmie had been losing heart because of Tom's fascism: but here again there is little evidence. She liked Mussolini: she called him 'that big booming man': she would have been content, probably, to wait and see what would happen to Tom's politics. It is true that she seemed to have become increasingly distrustful of Tom's power with words – his belief that he could manipulate people, and the world, just by his skill with words – but she might have learned to live with her distrust. There was however some joint inability with her and Tom to face the reality of the forces of darkness or helplessness within themselves; and thus in the other, and in the outside world. Cimmie perhaps began to lose heart because she could not get away from her innocence: if she began to, she did not know where she was: 'What am I? I forget: am I your squash-nosed wog tail?'

Tom wanted to alter the world; it is such wilful dreamers who do sometimes alter the world: but the whole perilous edifice of fascism was some demonstration of how things are not, rather than how they are. Before the demonstration people did not know this: they believed that human society and even human nature could be altered by reason and will: that if it could not, than at least people might die splendidly in the attempt. One demonstration of fascism was of the style in which people do in fact die in this attempt. Tom was an odd exponent of fascism because in spite of his talk about returning on his shield he did not in fact do so: there was always a part of him that was not taken in by his own romantic rhetoric. This did not prevent his being taken, by others, symbolically to be responsible for deaths.

In January 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany. There was an immediate outcrop of public brutality in which people who it was thought would not fit into the regime were sorted out as if they were dirt. Other people might have learned from this, then, if they had wanted to. Once the power of the party in Germany had been thus established public violence for a time calmed down. Perhaps it had been too sudden, and too arbitrary, for people to have been able to take in what it meant.

Harold Nicolson in his diary never suggests anything except that Cimmie was opposed to fascism (he wrote to her jokingly about his godson Michael 'Does Mikki have a swastika on his crib? that would

be the worst crib of all'). But Tom maintained she had come round to the idea before she died: she was certainly accepted as Tom's wife as part of the early fascist scene. There is a letter to her of January 1933 from the Battersea Branch of the BUF beginning 'Hail! Lady Cynthia' and asking for the loan of furniture and crockery to help set up the Area Office. But then at the same time came a letter from Russia from one of her friends of two years ago – 'Have you studied Marx yet? You would find it a tremendous help in clearing up doubts which continue to arise.'

In February there was a debate at the Friend's House in Euston Road in which Tom and James Maxton of the Independent Labour Party argued against each other with Lloyd George as chairman. There was a large audience containing many of Tom's and Cimmie's social friends. Fascism was still on the edge of being respectable. It was thought that Tom won the argument; but then, when people went away, there was still the question of what the winning of an argument meant.

In the middle of April Cimmie at last went to Rome with Tom, to take part in the celebrations around an International Fascist Exhibition. Starace, the Secretary of the Italian Fascist Party, presented a banner to the British Union of Fascists delegation: the banner was black with a Union Jack in the top corner and in the centre the fasces symbol (a bundle of bound sticks and an axe) around which were the words – *The British Union of Fascists For King-Empire and International Justice.* It was intended that the British delegation should be given the honour of sharing with Mussolini the saluting platform at a march past of contingents from all over Italy; but at the last moment it rained, and Mussolini retired to a covered balcony some distance away. Tom and his seven men stood to attention in front of the platform holding their banner while behind them in a stand – there are photographs of this – Cimmie looked down on them as if from a great height, rather bewildered and amused. She wore a raincoat and a sort of schoolmistress's brown felt hat. The other occasion during this trip to Rome of which a photograph has survived was of an official visit to the Roman Royal Academy. Tom and Cimmie are surrounded by frock-coated dignitaries and they both look absurdly young. Tom was thirty six. Cimmie was thirty four.

While she was in Rome Cimmie received a letter from a young admirer she had met at the Embassy:

> ... Unemployment being the big problem and the British Fascist's opportunity, surely the job is to strike the English imagination. What about voluntary labour battalions? I don't know anything about the

finance and organisation side, but it seems to me that if the fascists were to form battalions of unemployed (all classes) headed by determined young men who would march on the places where a job needs doing – building sports' grounds, clearing slums – and work scientifically and like hell, they'd capture the imagination of the public by a manifestation of ENERGY ...

I'm not going to chop words – the English are afraid Mosley is out for himself: they don't see that belief in oneself and belief in oneself as an instrument are different things. When they see a man who has actually got hold so to speak of a spade and is digging away with his pals it'll change the attitude a lot ... Mosley probably talks excellent sense on unemployment, but so many people are talking: let him form these labour battalions and choose definite and if possible spectacular jobs which can be done in record time ... It's the man who *does* something that is going to capture the imagination ...

No *physical* offensive. Defensive and if necessary *passive* in suffering. An example of *doing* in the physical sense and enduring in the spiritual.

This was the sort of good advice that Tom took at no time in his life: to him politics were a matter of oration, of argument: the matter of doing, though he talked about it so much, seldom seemed to get past the stage of making sure that his words could be heard. He was from now on never in a position of power from which he could put his words into direct effect: he did not see the strength of an action as a symbol. He never recognised for instance the harm that the activities, however logically justifiable, of the stewards at his meetings were doing him: he would not have seen the good that the rather absurd but symbolic use of voluntary labour battalions might do him. It would certainly have been some sort of anathema to him to have had to consider the idea of victory through suffering.

When Tom and Cimmie got home from Rome at the end of April Tom continued to visit Diana at 2 Eaton Square: Cimmie continued to fail to keep for long her 'solemn vow and covenant' not to show how much she suffered. She was encouraged by friends to have an affair of her own: she said she did not want to. Tom himself (so he told the story) encouraged her to have an affair: the lover he suggested for her was Dick Wyndham.

There is a story of this time that once when Tom was talking to Diana she asked him why Cimmie was so upset about her, Diana, when he had been involved with so many other women; Tom replied that Cimmie

had probably not known about most of the other women. Then the thought struck him (after all, rationally) – might it not help Cimmie to know about the other women because then it would help to take her mind off Diana? So he went home and told Cimmie a list of his women: and Cimmie said 'But they are all my best friends!'

The follow-up to this story was told by Bob Boothby. He and Tom were both at the same dinner party that night and Tom asked him, as one of Cimmie's greatest friends, if he would go to Smith Square after dinner and comfort her, because she was upset. Bob Boothby said 'What have you done to her now, Tom?' and Tom said 'I've told her all the women I've been to bed with since we've been married.' Bob Boothby said 'All, Tom?' and Tom said 'Well, all except her stepmother and her sister.'

In the spring holidays my sister and I were home from school and we were back again at Savehay Farm. My mother, for something to do, began to clear a two-acre wood at the end of the garden on the banks of the river. I helped her with this work: we dragged brushwood and fallen logs, and made bonfires. We did not often talk. Perhaps this was my mother's attempt to be 'doing in the physical sense and enduring in the spiritual'. I liked the work: it seemed more sensible than most things I had been part of in the grown-up world.

In early May there was school again and my mother drove me there in my father's dashing Bentley. After she had said goodbye and was going back past the rhododendrons she turned to wave – in her brown felt hat like the cup of an acorn – that figure which I suppose meant much of the world to me. I went off into the world of changing-rooms where boys were lethargically bashing one another up. Cimmie went to spend the weekend with Tom at Savehay Farm. At least, they had intended to spend the weekend together; but they had a terrible row on Sunday night – so Nanny later told Irene – and Tom walked out. Nanny heard Cimmie crying during the night.

On the morning of Monday 8th Cimmie wrote her last letter to Tom.

> Darling heart, I want to apologise for last night but I was feeling already pretty rotten and that made me I suppose silly. Anyhow I had a star bad night of feeling wretched and this morning was all in with sickness and crashing back and tummy ache I can't think what it is. The Dr says my 'wee' shows slight recrudescence of coli bacilli but he thinks it must be a chill. No temp, so it's nothing to worry about, but it's just as painful and ill-making a feeling as if I were 106. Enough of myself.

My darling precious if you can remember that it's a sort of crazed for-the-moment-off-her-balance and all-her-good-resolutions-gone Cim who 'nags' and just be kind to it – not fight back – I always regret so bitterly after, I could kill myself. I wouldn't have married anyone else for the world, I am ever so proud of being your wife, I do love and adore you so – that's the trouble – as much as 13 years ago and in a way more frightenedly as then I had confidence and was happy and now I cannot figure anything quite out any more. But I love you, love you, love you, want to look after you, help *you*, be with you: be a joy and assistance – an 'ever present help in trouble' instead of which half the time I am the exact opposite. I am feeling too done in to cope more now. Don't, I beg of you, say unkind things to me, and however much I drive you to it don't compare me unfavourably with the other one. You have no idea how desperately I mind and I am trying and fighting every min: of the day. I never have a 'let-off' to speak of.

My beloved darling darling Tom I love you so wholly as a wife and a mum, but also I want you as a lover and sweet companion and want to be 'gay bird' with you as well as 'stress and strain of public life'. I want the sun and the stars and the moon and they are all called Tomki. I still thought I had them right up to last Xmas in spite of everything. Perhaps I still have, who knows.

I wonder how the ancients acquired wisdom.

How tired you'll be with this my mutti-one.

Lotsie is coming for this weekend and I am getting ahead with the party.

Let's have a radiant day Thurs: without one cloud.

X O X O X O X O X O

that is a hug and these are loving thoughts

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Thursday May 11th was the thirteenth anniversary of Tom's and Cimmie's wedding. On the evening of May 8th, the day on which she had written the above letter, Cimmie was rushed to a nursing home in London with acute appendicitis; the appendix had perforated; she was operated on that night. There was a danger of peritonitis. (This was before the days of penicillin). For a few days the danger did not seem too great. Then it did.

The story of Cimmie's death is taken from Irene's diary. Irene was not an impartial witness; she wrote in her usual emotional, anarchic

style. But this was the sort of style that must have surrounded Cimmie from childhood; that she had hoped to get away from in marrying Tom. It is perhaps not inappropriate that Cimmie's death should be recorded in a manner in which it might seem that childhood was reclaiming her.

Irene was abroad in Switzerland when Cimmie became ill: she had just become engaged to be married at the age of thirty seven. She wrote a letter to Cimmie telling her of her engagement; and saying that she longed for her, Cimmie, to come to the wedding which was to be quietly in Switzerland but she did not want her other sister Baba to come; so could Cimmie please not tell Baba.

Irene learned of Cimmie's illness when she read about it in the *Continental Daily Mail* of May 11th. She sent a telegram to Tom, who replied that there was no need for her to come home as all was well. Then three days latter – 'A wire from Tom bombshelled me with utter horror: it said that Cim very seriously ill . . . peritonitis has set in.' Irene and her fiancé, Miles Graham, caught an aeroplane from Zurich and arrived in London on May 15th. They were met at the airport by Baba, but were too late to see Cimmie that day. The next day Cimmie was worse – she was having saline injections because she was too weak for blood transfusions. Irene went to the nursing home but she still did not get into Cimmie's room: 'Baba held the fort and sat outside Cim's door'. Then – 'Tom came in and said I must decide whether or not to see my Cim: it might kill her, and whilst there was life there was hope: and was it not better to remember her always as lovely, not now, ill and drawn.' And so – 'I refrained from going into that tragic bedroom.' Irene waited outside with Tom's mother, 'Ma'. She spoke to the doctors about Cimmie.

> Oh that afternoon of horror! Dr Kirkwood then divulged – she had never fought from the start, and her gaiety on the second day was a bad sign: both mentally and physically she had never lifted a finger to live. Ma, Andrée and I crouched outside that door whilst my angel breathed out her last few hours. Poor Tom came out once or twice and said he could get nothing through to her: if only the doctor had warned him she was going he has so much to tell her, and now he was trying to get through to her how magnificent her life had been in its splendour and fulfillment. She had said to him that morning 'I am going, goodbye, my Buffy' – what she always said when he walked away through the garden at Denham. Baba sat in broken solitude in the bathroom and try as I would to hold on to her hand she turned away from every advance. Ma told me alas! alas! Cim had

got her to read my last letter to her and so of course she read – 'I only want you not Baba at my wedding'!!

My precious got weaker and weaker and oh! her stertorous breathing in the last ½ hour was torture to hear through the crack in the door where I could just see the mirror: Tom murmuring to her his last words of love. I shall *never never* forget the pure ruthlessness of the pretty young nurse attendant on her all day: she stood outside that door going in and out and never even shed a tear though another little nurse by me was weeping sadly. I knew my love's spirit had fled by the sudden quiet and I saw Tom laying her beloved hands out. Baba went in and I ran to tell the men to get on to poor Nanny. I made plans for her to tell Viv and go at once and fetch Nick and I would be at Denham by the time they got back from Abinger. Tom came out after a bit, he hugged Baba pathetically, and thanked her for being there, and if I had not kissed him on the stairs he would have passed me by. But I saw so clearly Baba had been in the picture, I came in late, I could only stand and wait till needed. I went round to Dr Kirkwood's and waited there whilst he went to get luggage for Denham. Dr Kirkie said he had purposely written up all the slush of Tom's love at Cim's bedside because of so much Guinness scandal talk going about. I then sobbed and sobbed on the floor till Miles came back for me. I would not be able to get into my house because I had lent it to Elsie Fenwick for a debutante cocktail party party for Una!! Miles took me in his car to Denham. Oh! how the beauty of the place hurt me ... Her bedroom I went to pray in to help her children for always. But oh! she was everywhere – everywhere – and yet gone: the place was crying out for her. I met the children about 8.30 and took them up to their suppers. Nanny had told them and they had cried all the way back. I chattered over their ovaltines and God sustained me not to break down; and Micky Mouse awake in his bed got over sweet Nick getting into his. I then knelt by sweet Viv and explained to her Mummy was tired and would have been an invalid and God had given her perfect rest by taking her away but she was always so near us and around us. I then lay on the bed and the housemaid sustained me with sal volatile. Tom then appeared alone to walk hopelessly in the garden. Miles did such a good thing, he got the revolver out of Tom's room as I told him I felt Tom might do something dreadful. Ma then phoned would Tom go back as Cim was looking so lovely.

At Abinger Hill, in my dormitory, I remember the headmaster coming

in and saying Nanny was downstairs and would I go to her; and I was so pleased, so pleased; I had been back at school for about a week; I had been told my mother was ill, but children do not quite believe their parents' illnesses. (I had written to her two days before. 'How are you feeling? And is your tummy still aching?') I ran down to the headmaster's drawing-room and there was Nanny on the sofa and she told me my mother was dead and there was the feeling of the bottom falling out of the world, space and time going, and a terrible fear that this might not be bearable. I cried. Perhaps it is true that I remember so little about my mother because of what was not bearable.

I do not remember my Aunt Irene at Denham when we got back: my Aunt Irene was very good to us, but I suppose children have an instinct about what is required when things are falling. Nanny and my sister Vivien and I sat in a little heap by the nursery fire. Then our father came in and held out his arms to us. I don't think he could have done better.

Nanny told Irene about the last weekend at Savehay Farm before Cimmie went to the nursing home: it was presumed that Tom had gone to Diana when he had walked out on Saturday night. Irene wrote – 'Oh God what a terrible doom for Tom! and to think that Cim is gone and that Guinness is free and alive and oh! where is any balance or justice!'

Diana remembered the day when Cimmie died as being one of the worst of her life: many of her friends realised this, and wrote to her, and sent her flowers. Tom came round to see her briefly that night: he said that they would not be able to see each other for some time. She wondered if she would ever see him again. But he told her – It will be all right.

The 'slush' that Dr Kirkwood said he had 'written up' about Tom because of the 'Guinness scandal' came out in the papers the next day. The *Daily Telegraph* reported the doctor saying about Tom:

> Through the days and nights he never left her. He kept a ceaseless vigil by her side, and his devotion to his dying wife was the one bright spot in a losing fight. There was something perfect and beautiful about it ... how Sir Oswald stood the anxious strain I do not know ... Before Lady Cynthia lost consciousness it was wonderful to see them whisper encouragement to each other. She must have meant far more to her husband than the world knows. It may seem a rather strange thing to say, but they had a very beautiful time together during their last few days.

This was not the feeling amongst those who had once been Cimmie's and Tom's friends. Irene recorded that Nancy Astor was 'defiant and adamant in her opinion of Tom ... all this theatrical grief would pass like a mirage ... it was unbelievable the hatred against him and Cim's death in the House of Commons.' Irene herself 'tried to see it was best she had gone to suffer no more at Tom's hands'. Baba however explained (in Irene's words) 'Cim would rather have lived for her children and all the hell he put her through for one of the short elysian heights he and she definitely attained now and again.'

It was planned that Tom would build a tomb in a memorial garden for Cimmie in the wood by the river at Savehay Farm which she and her children had been clearing during the easter holidays. Until this was ready the coffin would lie in the chapel of the Astors' house at Cliveden a few miles away. There was a funeral service around the coffin at Smith Square for just Tom and his mother and Irene and Baba: at the same time there was a memorial service at St Margaret's Westminster for her friends. These had been told that Cimmie had wished that no one should wear mourning; so almost the only people who turned up in black were members of the BUF in their new shirts. Tom had asked that the organist should play the *Liebestod* from *Tristan and Isolde*, which had been played at their wedding thirteen years ago. The children were not taken to either of these ceremonies: it was thought that 'the sight of the coffin might shock them and mummy locked inside it'. Irene recorded that we were kept at Savehay Farm doing basket-work with her secretary: but I remember going out with my fishing net to the river and wondering about the damned grown-up world that did not teach you to know when your mother was dying and made it so difficult to say good-bye when she was dead.

After the service in Smith Square, in a room full of flowers, Tom sat for hours 'gazing and gazing at her coffin'. No one close to Tom at this time thought his grief was not genuine. Baba was called round to Ebury Street by a mutual friend that night because he was 'frightened for Tom'.

Tom made up bunches of flowers, and photographs, and messages, to lie on Cimmie's coffin while it remained at Cliveden. The messages were written on tiny bits of paper like confetti. After Tom's death I found them in an envelope with Tom's writing on it – *Not to be touched.* On these scraps that are like petals fallen from trees there is written – My love's last present to me on the anniversary of our wedding last Thursday May 11th – Tiny Pres for my darling love I love you so always and for ever – Happy kippers my own darling one with love for ever

misses her so – Come over Denham my darling where you are with me always and I love you for ever. And at the bottom of each note there is one of the tiny drawings in Tom's wild, child-like hand that were the talismans of his and Cimmie's life together – the sheep, the turtle, the piglet.

CHAPTER 26

Beyond the Game

Whatever was destructive about Tom's and Cimmie's life together was the result of their trying for too much, not a failure to do enough. Tom had the crazy belief that he could get away with almost anything – adoring wife, passionate mistress, goodness knows what else – keep everyone happy when he wanted them to be happy and avoid them when he wanted to get away. He wanted to create and run a revolutionary political movement that when he chose might seem conventional: that would both break and not break the rules. He evolved some sort of philosophy about all this – in later life he tried to write it – it sprang from a genuine conviction that old forms of life, social and personal, were dying, and that some new type of society and of human being had to emerge if there was to be hope for humanity. He took his pessimism about the old world from Spengler and his optimism about what might be new from Nietzsche: but he thought he could 'go beyond' Spengler and he misread Nietzsche (or did not read him enough): he imagined that Nietzsche was talking about politics when he was talking about states of mind. Nietzsche had found that to talk about a new type of man required a new style of language: this language was often ironic: it half mocked the so desperately serious things it was trying to say. Nietzsche thought that some such style was necessary if one was to face truth about human affairs and not get carried away or overwhelmed by the vision. This style, possibly might be the mark of a new type of man. But there would still be rules, on a higher level, of a new type of game.

Tom with part of himself picked up this style: he was unusually witty: he was sometimes humorous about himself. But then some sort of curtain would go up and he became like a ham actor on a stage; he became roaring, runaway, all-of-a-piece, savage; he was like a bus with no brakes going down a hill. It was always a bit of a mystery why he

let himself go like this. Rudeness was perhaps some sort of relief when the pain of looking at the truth of things became too much.

The image that Tom built up for himself was that of Faust: of someone always striving, always searching, because that was what a human being was for. This was his justification for his arrogance and his energy: it was not just for himself, but was part of a training by which 'great' things could be achieved. But the only justification for this justification is that he should have been ready to face, to examine, everything: he should not have picked what results of his experiments he should pay attention to and what he would not. When he went roaring off on his hobby horses it was as if he were turning his back on pursuers. Protection is an activity natural to politicians: it has nothing to do with Faust.

Cimmie could not free herself from Tom whatever he did or did not do to her: this had given him security to go roaring off. The more he went his own way the more Cimmie heroically put up with it: by increasing his confidence, she increased her pain. This circle went on running away with itself until, suddenly, there was a death. It is difficult to see, perhaps, another outcome. Cimmie does not seem to have been able seriously to consider the possibility of her leaving him: until she could do this Tom would always have been able to hurt her. And so she would nag at him, and so he would have an excuse to get away from her: and so it would go on; but it was to herself the nagging caused too much pain.

After Cimmie's death Tom's great grief was genuine; but he used his grief, as he had once used her love of him, to spur himself on. Tragedy was not something that might make him change his ways. He built his memorial to her in the garden at Savehay Farm: he told Harold Nicolson that he 'now regards his [fascist] movement as a memorial to Cimmie and is prepared willingly to die for it'. There was nothing in fascism that could not assimilate images of death.

Another memorial was planned for Cimmie: there was to be a children's Day Nursery in south London named after her, and subscribed to by her friends. This was organised by Irene and Baba. An appeal went out over the signatures of Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin, George Lansbury and Lloyd George.

Tom became involved in attempts to 'get through' to Cimmie by spiritualist mediums: these were organised by one of his mother's sisters. There was one quite striking result when a medium came up with the word engraved on the inside of Cimmie's wedding ring which was thought to be known only by Cimmie and Tom. Most of the messages

that came through however were, as usual, strangely impersonal; though they did often have a peculiarly political content – 'Tom pursues a good course by going to Manchester: he should try to fight Salford and a better spirit will prevail'. One such message, passed on in a letter from his aunt to Tom, had even a weirdly prophetic ring: 'I feel he will never be able now to manage to move near another new policy while he gives stiffs all the more important posts'. The medium was asked twice if 'stiffs' was the right word: the reply each time was 'Yes'.

Tom took up again the reins of his fascist movement: his mother 'Ma' emerged from the shadows and became leader of the woman's section of the British Union of Fascists. She announced 'When my son married Lady Cynthia, she took her place by his side. Now she is dead there must be someone to help him in his work and I am going to do my best to fill the gap.' In July Tom and his mother led a big fascist march round London which began, whether by chance or design, close to Diana's house in Eaton Square. Irene reported:

> Saw Tom amassing his fascists in Eaton Square and Ma the women: then from Colin Davidson's window in Grosvenor Place we watched the March Past along with Zita, Beatrice Guinness, Patrick Hepburn, and Hitler's jester lover 'bugger' Hanfstaengl – a magnificant type of man who plays the piano beautifully, is anxious and oily and utterly evasive on any real question. At first with Colin and Zita and then alone I followed on foot, car and taxi Tom's march all round London to see no harm came to him: it was a splendid show and no trouble and I greeted him when he came back to H.Q. and he made a short speech from the top of a car.

Tom's ex-sisters-in-law were being very solicitous about him at this time: they stopped talking about his 'musical comedy' blackshirts. With Cimmie dead, they were trying to comfort him: they saw that he was doing his best to be a good father to his children. 'Nanny said Tom was very sad yesterday and his sweetness with the children hour after hour Sunday was wonderful.' But above all what Baba and Irene and 'Ma' seemed to be getting together about was a determination to try to prevent him seeing Diana.

> Baba and I were scared stiff when we learned Tom had gone up for dinner Sunday night and was back by 1 a.m. and was doing the same tonight. Who could it be but Diana Guinness. Baba and I, I know, were both sick with terror.

The reason ostensibly given for this attitude was that any further association between Tom and Diana would in some way be hurtful to Cimmie: Baba 'could not make him see the cruelty of it to Cim first and foremost'. But even Irene, with her haphazardness of mind and style, must have found it difficult to continue to convince herself that hers and Baba's feelings were as grandiose as this. A plan was made that later on in the summer, while Irene took the older children on a holiday, Baba should go on a motoring trip in France with Tom to give him further comfort – having 'asked for a fortnight's leave' from her husband Fruity. Irene consulted Tom about this: 'I definitely sensed he wanted Baba alone or no one, and I saw his point about this'. Fruity, however, seems to have seen a less blinkered point: to Irene he 'muttered about all this Tom hysteria and Baba's sacrifice to him watching and guarding him – he saw it as all bunk and false' – here Fruity even got out a bit of resentful rage '– when Tom had killed sweet Cim in cruelty and mental torture'. People were becoming involved in the sort of manipulations, conscious or unconscious, that they blamed Tom so bitterly for.

In early May Diana had asked for a divorce: this had been agreed: moreover it had been arranged that her husband would, according to the gentlemanly conventions of the time, appear to be the guilty party so that Diana need not be accused.

Tom went to see Diana again in June: Eaton Square was only three minutes walk from Ebury Street. He came after dark. He said – referring to her proceedings for divorce – 'Have you jumped your little hurdle yet?' Diana replied 'It's my whole life!' They had a terrible row; and Tom went away.

Irene and Baba and Ma were all on the telephone about this.

> When Baba rang him up he had gone to London – there could only be one – and we were scared stiff. I had a talk with Ma over the phone and she told me she was worried – that the horror had sent for Tom after her divorce coming up ... It puts Baba in a fearful fix about motoring in France with Tom as if he is seeing Diana none of us could have the heart to deal with him: the idea is utterly unthinkable. Zita could give us no gossip on her; she had seen her at 2 dinners doing the grim-wan-dead-white-face line ...

But Tom, as was his way, seems to have used the row with Diana to give his ex-sister-in-law and his mother the assurances they required:

> He had asked Ma to tell Baba and me he never contemplated meeting Diana after his trip with Baba. Ma had told him what gossip she had heard about the girl saying she was going to get him now and that those who knew her said she was the most determined minx and that she talked to everyone. Tom refused to believe the tales and said she was dignified and sweet and would never gabble. Ma cried and said Tom was so marvellous to his children and that perhaps Cim had died to save his soul: I wondered!

Tom's assurance to Diana – they soon made up their quarrel – was that it would be useful to themselves if it became known that he was seeing a lot of Baba: during the long period before Diana's divorce became final he and Diana had to be careful about their being seen together and so a 'cover' would be useful: these were the days when any hint of adultery on the part of the petitioner or so-called 'not-guilty' party could, if it was brought to the attention of an official called the King's Proctor, render a divorce invalid.

Tom told Baba (Irene reported) that he had to see Diana occasionally because he could not 'shirk his obligations'. All this intrigue was representative of something which had presumably always been going on but which Cimmie by her good nature had rendered almost innocent. This was now the conscious style of life around Tom: the permutations of passion and deception and self-deception seemed endless:

> When I saw Baba later although she could not tell me details as she has been sworn to secrecy by Tom I knew he had killed something in her after all these months of devotion and sacrifice to him as she could not reconcile and told him so this frenzied love for Cim trying now to get mediums and the horror of seeing Diana on and off – dining with her as he says platonically – and she still could not make him see the cruelty of it to Cim ... I knew she felt she could hardly start on the motor trip now if at all ...
>
> Baba had had lunch with Tom and had fairly let fly about Diana whom she loathes and she tried to make Tom see that if he went on like this he would be utterly killed and his future smashed as people would not stand for it but he seemed more smashed over having hurt Baba and was asking her to tell him what to do – anything to restore that confidence ...
>
> I cannot get over Tom's consideration towards Babs ... I pray this obsession with her will utterly oust Diana Guinness ...

What was happening, of course, was that Tom was once more managing to do his juggling act of keeping people and passions in the air at the same time. There was even a curious incursion from his private world into his public world, which people apart from Tom seemed to view with the deepest suspicion:

> Ma was harrassed by Unity Mitford now joining the Fascist cause, and she was sure she was doing it to spy on Tom in the office as she had asked such curious questions of Lady Makgill ... This wretch is wanting to sell blackshirts and walk in parades and attend all meetings – for what reason?

Tom and Baba went off on their motoring trip through France: Irene and Vivien and Nicholas and Andrée, Cimmie's ex-lady's-maid, set out on a cruise to the Canary Isles: Nanny and Michael went to the Isle of Wight. Diana and her sister Unity went on a journey to Germany which, Diana said later, changed Unity's life. In Munich they met Putzi Hanfstaengl – he whom Irene had just previously described (in words not literally but perhaps metaphorically apt) as 'Hitler's jester lover bugger'. Putzi Hanfstaengl – 'a huge man with an exaggerated manner' (Diana's description) – took them to the Nuremberg Parteitag, the first huge Nazi rally after Hitler had come to power. Diana wrote – 'A feeling of excited triumph was in the air, and when Hitler appeared an almost electric shock passed through the multitude.'

This is the moment to end this book; with the characters abroad and getting ready for their new parts and re-alignments. The story of the next thirteen years is the story of Tom's fascism; of his attempt to prevent war; of his new and extraordinary private juggling acts; of the passions and duplicities surrounding these but also of the bright, violent feeling that followed my father wherever he went; as he made stands about crucial events; as he occasionally dallied on the Mediterranean; as he marched his blackshirt army against the blank wall of war. His children had to learn to come to terms with all this: not only with a world in which their mother had died and people suggested their father had killed her (and their father told them how wonderful his marriage had been) but with a world in which now their father was apt to march down Oxford Street at the head of people who if you looked at them in one way were magnificent and if you looked at them in another were like soldiers from Selfridge's toy shop. Also – why was the world going towards war? And why were people so angry at my father for trying to stop this? As an adolescent, one built up one's own defence works;

came up against one's own brick walls. There were not so many refuges now in the hidey-holes of childhood. Some sort of acceptance, or technique, had to be worked out in the mind.

Tom's energy seemed to carry him over difficulties like someone on a flying carpet. He went on perfecting his marvellous powers with words: he lifted people off their chairs with them. Part of his appeal as a fascist was that he seemed to be a single, lonely figure taking on all the challenges of the world. But then, he was too powerful for people to think they might really help him. He did perform some service by getting what he had called the extremist forces of the country in his hands: violence in England, unlike that on the continent, was for the most part symbolic.

His children learned something from Tom about how to trust themselves: but how might they explain this? Part of what they learned was that the power of words was both wonderful and terrible.

There is a photograph of myself and my sister Vivien and my Aunty Irene at this time: we are on our cruise ship between the Canary Isles and Southampton: we are at one of those fancy dress balls so beloved by people with nothing to do. Aunty is dressed in what she referred to in her diary as her 'white lace veil as a mantilla'. Vivien is in 'her mummy's turkish harem dress'. Nicky is just 'in his burnous'. We do seem to be involved in some journey through purgatory: I at least am dressed for the part. When we got back from our cruise we went to join Nanny and Micky in the Isle of Wight: then Daddy and Aunty Baba came down and told us of their wonderful motoring trip through France: and everything was much as before, except that 'Tom was getting up and handing the vegetables round' and it was now Tom and Viv who 'went bang bang at each other with the coltish smacking and chaffing which I hate' (Irene). But what about Uncle Fruity? This however was the sort of question one did not ask grown-ups: they were apt to shoot at each other hurt glances, like that time for instance when I had told Nanny an amusing limerick I had picked up at school. It was better, I had learned, if one wanted to find out about life, to wait to talk with people of one's own age; who seemed to have the gift to laugh and be serious and be curious without deluding themselves or dying because they were hurt.

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N.M.

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Sir Oswald Mosley – aristocrat, socialist, social lion – became, after 1932 when he founded the British Union of Fascists, one of the most hated men in England. This personal story by the eldest son of Sir Oswald (Tom) and his first wife Cimmie sheds light on the nature of an extraordinary man and an unconventional marriage. In sharing his efforts to understand his parents, Nicholas Mosley provides insights on how personalities are shaped, and on how a society which can propagate a public figure such as Mosley can also make his memory taboo.

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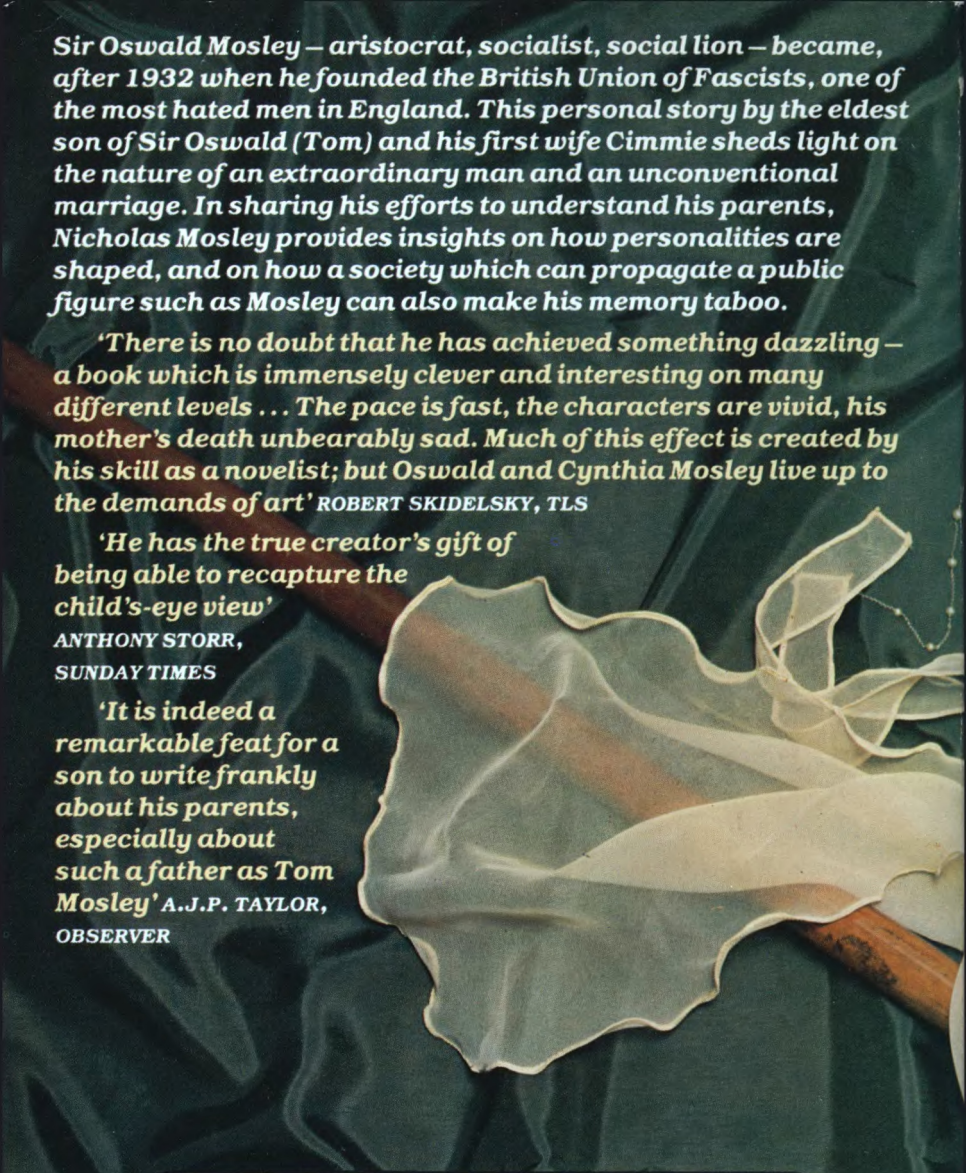

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